AUTOSPORT

LANDO NORRIS

IS THIS THE 2025 F1 CHAMPION?

EDDIE JORDAN TRIBUTE

LELLA LOMBARDI F1 TRAILBLAZER

BTCC 2025 SEASON PREVIEW

POWERED BY GP RACING

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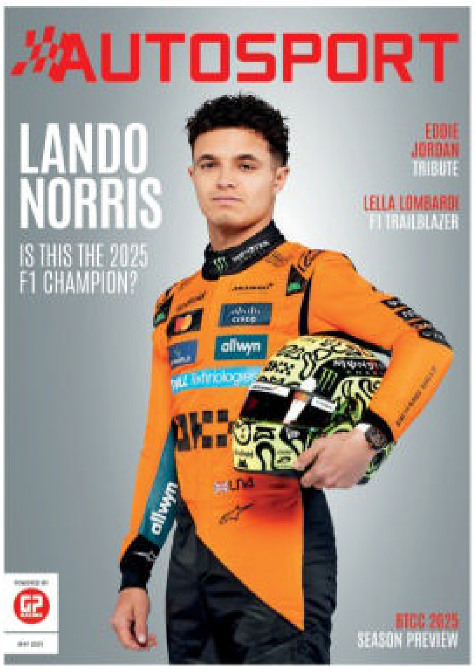
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10 APRIL-7 MAY 2025

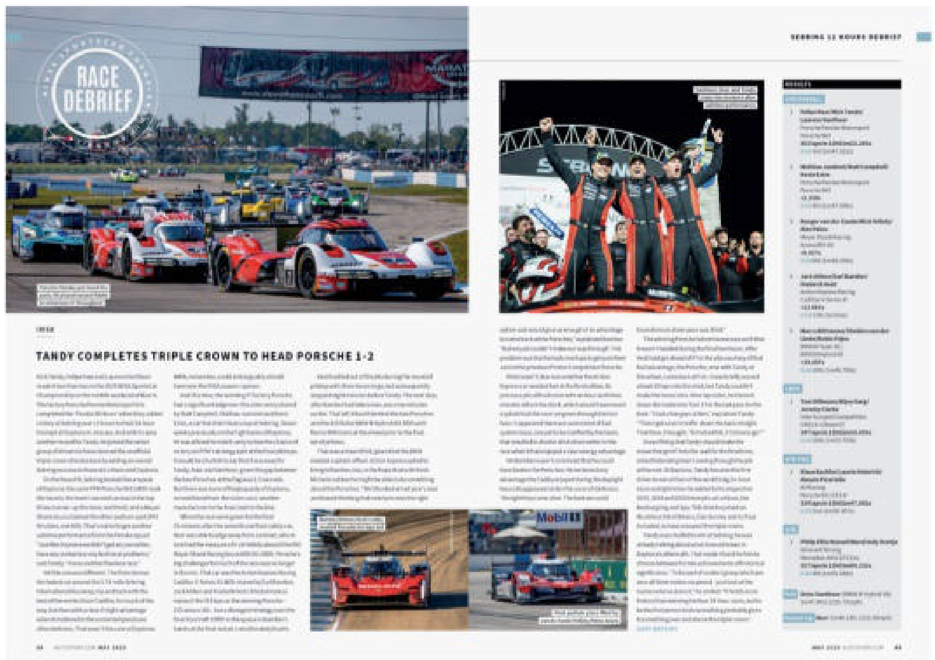
COVER IMAGE: McLAREN

Eddie Jordan 1948-2025

A maverick possessed of a passion for racing matched only by a deal-making zeal, both freely given vent via a disarming, and often ribald, gift of the gab

EDDIE JORDAN
1948-2025

"It's unlikely that working as a bank clerk would have satisfied his entrepreneurial bent for long"


RACE DEBRIEF

SEBRING 12 HOURS DEBRIEF

TANDY COMPLETES TRIPLE CROWN TO HEAD PORSCHE 1-2

British Touring Car Championship preview

CATACLEAN

FLASHBACK!

Three-time champion Gordon Shedden is back in the British Touring Car Championship for 2025. And the Toyota newcomer's first day in a BTCC car for 29 months came on a March day at Snetterton

MARCUS SIMMONS

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Is Lando Norris now ready to take Max Verstappen's crown after a strong start to 2025?

THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES

Norris is no longer F1's title apprentice

It's hard to argue that Max Verstappen isn't the most complete driver currently on the Formula 1 grid, even taking into account his and Red Bull's 'foibles', but Lando Norris has looked like the closest thing to a challenger to the Dutchman over the past year.

In fact, as Norris tells Alex Kalinauckas in our cover feature on page 28, the Briton reckons he really started to understand what was needed to run at the front when chasing Verstappen in 2023. Now, having learned from his up-against-it title challenge in 2024, and armed with what appears to be the best car in the form of the McLaren MCL39, there's a feeling it *could* be his year.

Norris talks about his mindset, the advantage of having the rapid Oscar Piastri as his team-mate, and the drivers he thinks are most likely to challenge in 2025.

While Red Bull's struggles have continued, leading to Liam Lawson losing his drive after just two grands prix, sister squad Racing Bulls has looked quietly impressive. Jake Boxall-Legge takes a look at the changes that have boosted the team formerly known as AlphaTauri and Toro Rosso (p42), while Oleg Karpov has an enlightening chat with Sauber F1 rookie Gabriel Bortoleto (p50).

The saddest news from the paddock was that Eddie Jordan had died at the age of 76, at the end of March. Our tribute to one of F1's true mavericks starts on p16.

Outside of F1, Oliver Rowland has been one of the most impressive British single-seater racers in recent times. The Formula E points leader talks to James Newbold about his return to Nissan and challenge to defeat the championship powerhouses of Porsche and Jaguar in our Single Seaters section, while Rowland's fellow McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner Tom Gamble speaks to Gary Watkins about his big Aston Martin Hypercar chance on p94.

The British Touring Car Championship kicks off at Donington Park at the end of the month. Marcus Simmons interviews returning triple champion Gordon Shedden and picks out the key things to watch in our season preview, which starts on p113.

Stephen Lickorish is your guide to the TOCA support categories (p140) in our National section, which also looks ahead to the GB3 campaign (p134) and features another star car from club motorsport (p144).

There has been much discussion about the future of the World Rally Championship in recent months. Tom Howard explains where things currently sit and what the key stakeholders think on p104, as well as reviewing last month's Safari Rally (p101) and the drivers' response to the FIA's recent clampdown on swearing (p103).

We'll be speaking to more key motorsport players next time as we build up towards the Monaco GP, Indianapolis 500 and Le Mans 24 Hours, so look out for our June issue from 8 May.

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor
kevin.turner@autosport.com

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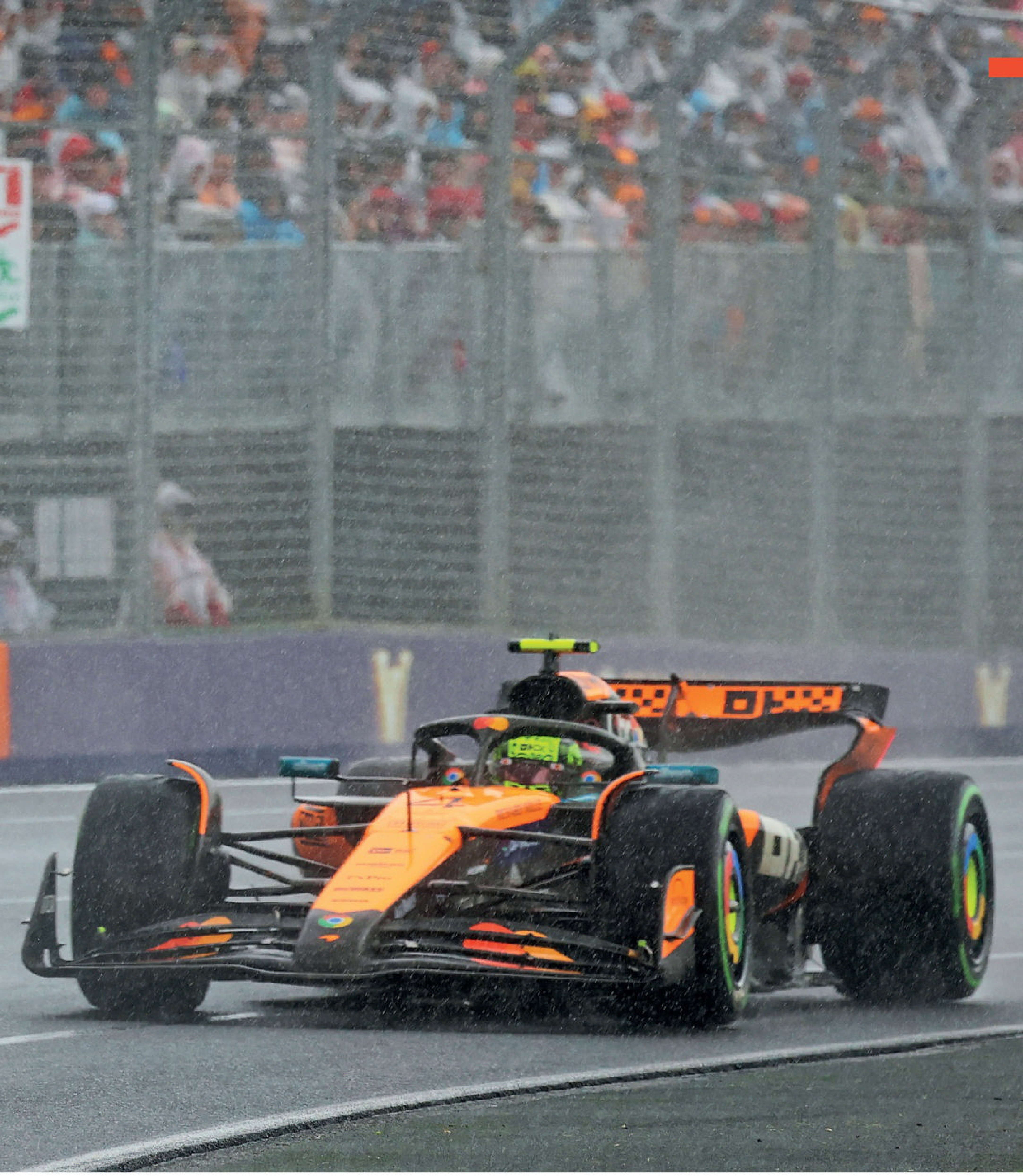
Tread with care, Charles

Charles Leclerc's slick-shod Ferrari is a struggle to hang on to as the clouds open at Melbourne's Albert Park circuit, in contrast to the McLaren of eventual race winner Lando Norris, who's altogether more sure-footed – and at this point poised to steam past – sporting a recently fitted set of intermediate rubber. Ferrari paid a high price with its gamble to stay out in the expectation of the rain not worsening in the Formula 1 season opener. "We weren't the fastest out there," rued Leclerc, "but in such weather conditions there was a chance of scoring some big points which we didn't capitalise on. We stopped a lap too late to switch to inters, losing positions. [It's] something we'll sort out as a team, looking into our decisions and making sure we make the right call if the situation comes up again." Australian GP race debrief, page 12.

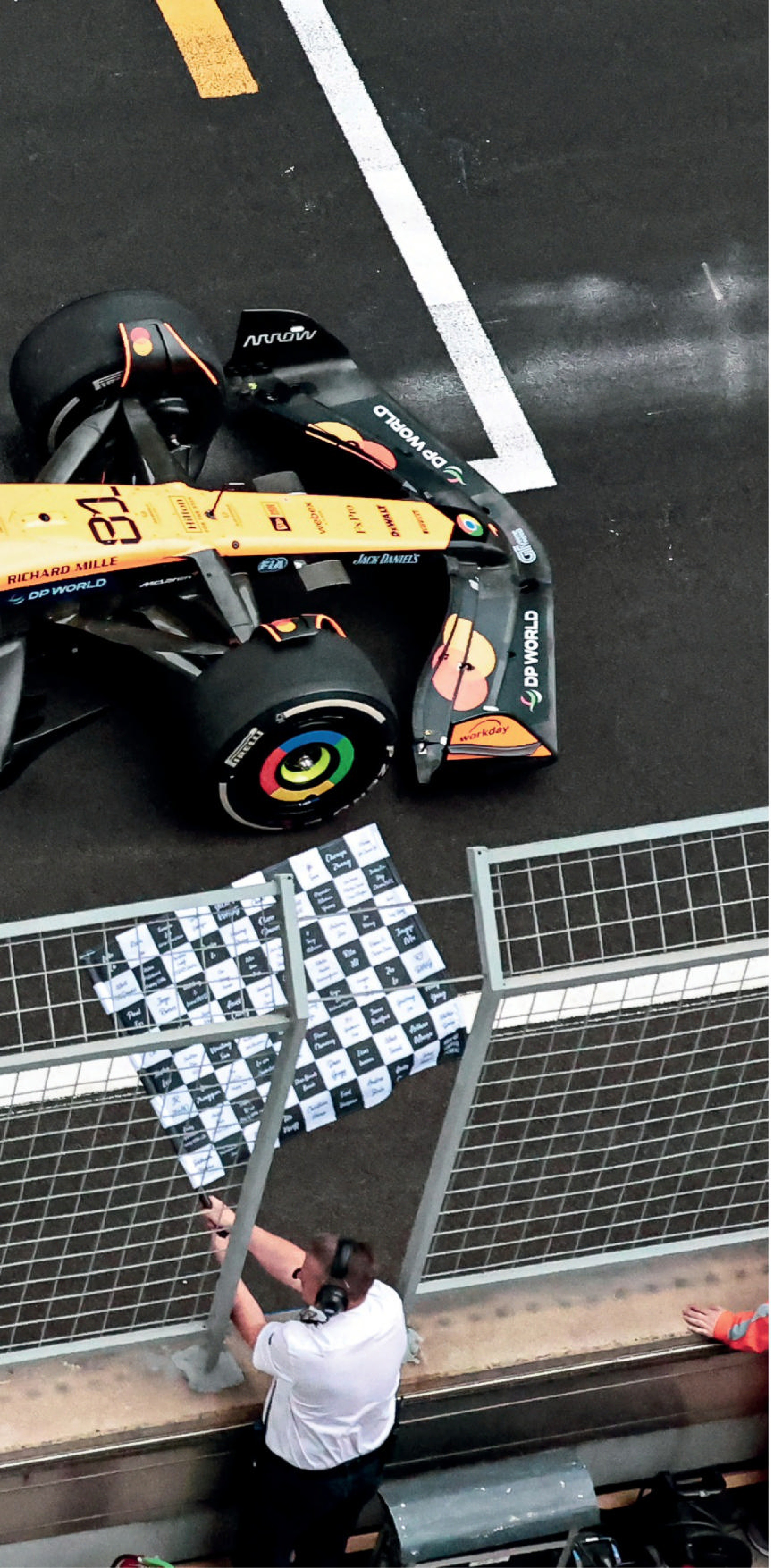


Photographer Mark Thompson/
Getty Images

Where Melbourne, Australia
When Sunday 16 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R1,
RF100-500mm lens, 1/800th @ F6.3

Chrome
avenga
81
DELL Technologies
cisco
okta
P ZERO
rent-a-jet
FxPro



Piastri steps it up in Shanghai

Oscar Piastri reckons the Chinese Grand Prix was the race in which he struggled the most last year. So evidence of the way in which the 24-year-old Australian keeps upping his game could not be more obvious than his commanding victory from a maiden Formula 1 pole position in Shanghai last month. "It's been an incredible weekend," he enthused, "and the car has been mega the whole time. The tyres behaved very differently to the earlier sessions here, but the race we've managed to pull off has been excellent." Chinese GP debrief, page 14.

Photographer Song Haiyuan/ Paddocker/NurPhoto/Getty Images

Where Shanghai, China
When Sunday 23 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
1/12800th @ F2.8

Jordan's joy bubbles over

The release of unselfconscious jubilation with which Eddie Jordan responded to his Formula 1 team's maiden victory in the 1998 Belgian Grand Prix – his famous hop, skip and jump jig along the Spa pitlane preceding the champagne-soaked podium celebration – capped a chaotically memorable event. Afterwards Jordan said: "Spa has been very kind to me, both in F3 and F3000, we've been on pole position here, we were second here last year, but nothing even comes close to this. The turnaround has been phenomenal – five or six races ago we were absolute also-rans to being first and second here. It's a great feeling, I have to say!" Eddie Jordan obituary, page 16.

Photographer Michael Cooper/
Allsport/Getty Images

Where Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium
When Sunday 30 August 1998

McLaren driver's victory from pole position (plus fastest lap) was still no walk in the park

MASON

FORMULA 1

NORRIS'S SWEET TRIUMPH ON A WET AND WILD DAY OF DRAMA

"A lot of tough moments. I guess that's what makes it sweeter." The moments to which Australian Grand Prix winner Lando Norris was referring encompassed a wet-dry-wet thriller, three safety car periods, pressure from the brilliant Oscar Piastri with the same car kit, *and* the advances of Max Verstappen in conditions in which the Dutchman always excels. It all, surely, added up to Norris's most accomplished F1 win to date.

He'd edged Piastri to the first pole of 2025 by just 0.084 seconds. The next quickest car – Verstappen's Red Bull – came in 0.385s down, the McLaren very light on its rear tyres on the demanding Albert Park layout, just like the Red Bull of 2023.

That was under broiling, overcast skies on qualifying day. Those clouds were back with a vengeance on the Sunday, cancelling Formula 2 and Supercars support races early doors. Melbourne wasn't to lose another season opener to go with the 2020 COVID-19 farce, but the lights still didn't go out as planned at 3pm local time.

As the formation lap got under way with the pack on intermediate tyres – including pitlane starters Liam Lawson and Ollie Bearman, to close old loopholes on such drivers gaining an extra lap of fuel – Isack Hadjar touched a perilous wet white line going through Turn 2 and crashed his Racing Bulls car backwards. No debut for him.

As the devastated Hadjar was being consoled by Lewis Hamilton's father Anthony in the paddock, the other drivers were back on the grid under the aborted start procedure. Racing finally did get going after a 15-minute delay.

In such slippery moments, Verstappen is inevitable. He surged from row two using the honed Red Bull start systems that, since late 2023, have made it class-leading in low grip conditions. He was quickly alongside Piastri and then even had a look outside Norris on the run to Turn 1 – the polesitter responding with a half-chop to see him off. But both McLarens wobbled massively in Turn 2 (Norris's did twice) and Verstappen powered around the outside of Piastri to run second. Then, just three corners later, the race was neutralised, after Jack Doohan crashed out in a similar manner to Hadjar, before Carlos Sainz shunted at the last corner under the already established safety car activation. He'd been undone by unfamiliarity with the way Williams's engine mapping delivers torque when set to its safety car mode.

Once the leader had nailed the restart on lap eight of 57, Verstappen pursued Norris closely.

Verstappen was an immediate threat to the McLarens off the line

ILLMAN

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

He was never more than 1.4s behind, with DRS enabled on lap 12. But, four tours later, Verstappen lost 0.6s as his tyres overheated while he pushed to match McLaren's pace. On the next lap, the wet-weather master locked his left-front at Turn 11 and slid deep on the wet kerb, allowing Piastri past.

"We had no chance – McLaren just took off," Verstappen would later reflect. After shipping an average of 0.84s over the next 16 laps, Verstappen was 18.3s off the lead and seemingly without a shot at victory. Piastri, however, did have a major chance of breaking Australia's home 'curse'. Having been 3s off Norris when trailing Verstappen, he'd whittled that gap down to DRS range in the 11 laps following the world champion's off.

But now, on lap 30, with Norris coming up to lap Lawson and the Haas pair, McLaren acted. It reignited its 2024 team orders narrative by ordering Piastri to "hold position". He pointed out "I'm faster" but complied. On the next lap, once the traffic was cleared, he asked if the order was to be lifted, but was denied. Only on lap 32 – by which time Piastri was back to 3.4s adrift after a Turn 6 gravelstrike – was he permitted to re-engage.

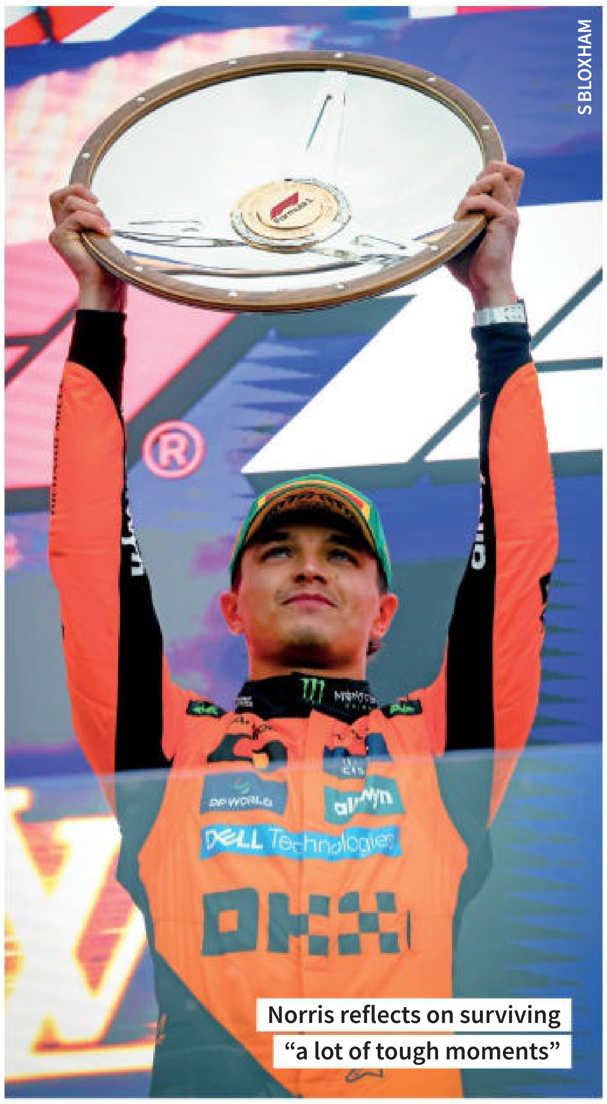
Norris and Piastri had been pushing to ensure they got priority whenever the call to pit came. McLaren team boss Andrea Stella explained that his squad needed "clarity as to the weather prediction and what this meant for how we should have used the tyres, and until we had closed the matter of overtaking the backmarkers".

By this stage, Piastri was paying the price for his early pushing, having "killed" his front-left intermediate while catching Norris. But Piastri falling slightly back aided McLaren when it came to the lap 34 double-stack it enacted when the safety car was called back out. Fernando Alonso had crashed hard at Turn 7 on lap 33, having unsettled his Aston Martin on the vicious Turn 6 exit kerb.

Tramline dry patches had been growing steadily bigger, and so here the pack switched to slick tyres – hards on the McLarens, mediums for Verstappen.

When racing resumed on lap 42, Norris took off, dropping Piastri by 2.7s in just two laps (0.8s he'd established powering back up to speed as the safety car peeled in). During this phase, Norris suggested pitting pre-emptively to return to intermediates, as another rain band approached the final sector. McLaren discouraged the idea.

On lap 44, the rain was indeed falling properly again and the race's biggest moments of jeopardy played out for McLaren. Norris hit the wettest patch at Turn 12 and skated into the gravel. Piastri followed with a bigger moment. Verstappen, his medium tyres retaining temperature when the hards would not, stayed on track. Norris scampered back on and headed for the pits, but Piastri's faster, tighter line through the gravel pitched him off at Turn 13 as well. He'd lose a lap spinning in the soaked grass but powered back to rescue ninth.


S BLOXHAM

Norris reflects on surviving "a lot of tough moments"

Now Red Bull had a choice. It had a faint shot of nailing victory, in a way McLaren failed to do in a similar scenario last year in Canada, if it pitted Verstappen. The timing screens showed a 21.1s lead when passing the pits, which covers the 12.6s Melbourne pitlane drive-through time. Assuming Red Bull matched McLaren's 3s Norris pitstop time, and allowing approximately 2s either side as a margin of error, that still added up to a narrow lead.

But Red Bull insiders insist that its simulation tools showed Verstappen as already 1s unsafe, and so it opted to send him around again in the hope that the rain would ease. When it didn't, in he came.

Those who'd joined Norris in pitting on lap 44 won big – including George Russell (who would finish a fine third), Alex Albon, Andrea Kimi Antonelli, Lance Stroll and Nico Hulkenberg. Those who gambled on staying out – the two Ferraris and Yuki Tsunoda – lost out badly.

After Lawson and Gabriel Bortoleto crashed shortly afterwards, Norris had to ace a final restart. This set up a six-lap shootout, with Verstappen very much back to full threat with fresh intermediates. He was initially held at no more than 1.7s adrift, but with just two laps remaining Norris lost 0.65s dipping a wheel into the Turn 6 gravel and also damaged his floor. This, combined with his hard-worn inters, made the last two laps tense.

Verstappen got close, twice, into the Turns 9/10 swoops but could not make a pass. This day of wild, wet drama went to Norris.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

POWERED BY motorsport STATS

RESULTS ROUND 1/24

ALBERT PARK
16.03.25 / 58 LAPS

POS	DRIVER	TIME	GRID
1	**Lando Norris** McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	1h42m06.304s	1
2	**Max Verstappen** Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+0.895s	3
3	**George Russell** Mercedes F1 W16	+8.481s	4
4	**Andrea Kimi Antonelli** Mercedes F1 W16	+10.135s	16
5	**Alexander Albon** Williams-Mercedes FW47	+12.773s	6
6	**Lance Stroll** Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	+17.413s	13
7	**Nico Hulkenberg** Sauber-Ferrari C45	+18.423s	17
8	**Charles Leclerc** Ferrari SF-25	+19.826s	7
9	**Oscar Piastri** McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	+20.448s	2
10	**Lewis Hamilton** Ferrari SF-25	+22.473s	8
11	**Pierre Gasly** Alpine-Renault A525	+26.502s	9
12	**Yuki Tsunoda** Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	+29.884s	5
13	**Esteban Ocon** Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+33.161s	19
14	**Ollie Bearman** Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+40.351s	20
R	**Liam Lawson** Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	46 laps/ accident	18
R	**Gabriel Bortoleto** Sauber-Ferrari C45	45 laps/ accident	15
R	**Fernando Alonso** Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	32 laps/ accident	12
R	**Carlos Sainz** Williams-Mercedes FW47	0 laps/ accident	10
R	**Jack Doohan** Alpine-Renault A525	0 laps/ accident	14
NS	**Isack Hadjar** Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	0 laps/ accident	11

FASTEST LAP **Norris** 1m22.167s (143.689mph)

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED

HARD	MEDIUM	SOFT		
C3	C4	C5	INTERMEDIATE	WET

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 **Norris** 25; 2 **Verstappen** 18; 3 **Russell** 15; 4 **Antonelli** 12; 5 **Albon** 10; 6 **Stroll** 8; 7 **Hulkenberg** 6; 8 **Leclerc** 4; 9 **Piastri** 2; 10 **Hamilton** 1; 11 **Gasly** 0; 12 **Tsunoda** 0; 13 **Ocon** 0; 14 **Bearman** 0; **Sainz** 0; **Hadjar** 0; **Alonso** 0; **Doohan** 0; **Bortoleto** 0; **Lawson** 0

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 **McLaren** 27; 2 **Mercedes** 27; 3 **Red Bull** 18; 4 **Williams** 10; 5 **Aston Martin** 8; 6 **Sauber** 6; 7 **Ferrari** 5; 8 **Alpine** 0; 9 **Racing Bulls** 0; 10 **Haas** 0

OSCAR
P1
LANDO
P2

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP • ROUND 2 •

RACE DEBRIEF

PADDOCKER/NURPHOTO

FORMULA 1

PIASTRI DOMINATES CHINESE GP; HAMILTON BREAKS SPRINT DUCK

"My most complete weekend in Formula 1" was how eventual 2025 Chinese Grand prix winner Oscar Piastri described his efforts in sealing a first career Formula 1 pole and his opening victory of the campaign, after taking second in the sprint contest. The victor in the shorter race was one Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari, sealing two pieces of F1 history in winning his first race for the team and his maiden sprint since their 2021 introduction.

Hamilton had topped sprint qualifying, and being able to head the pack without dirty air exacerbating the major tyre graining at Shanghai was key to his victory. But his topping of SQ3 was only possible because McLaren underperformed. Piastri was returning to the "track I struggled the most at last year", which had been entirely resurfaced. The new un-jet-blasted surface – "naturally aged", said Pirelli motorsport boss Mario Isola – meant Lando Norris was suddenly the exposed McLaren driver on this front-end-limited course.

Piastri had begun his quest for 2025 Shanghai success "scratching our heads" with McLaren team principal Andrea Stella in the aftermath of his run to eighth here a year ago, and this time loaded up his fronts more and attacked with confidence that the car would stick. Both elements were aided by the new track surface being much higher grip, plus McLaren's improved car package. But, overall, Piastri's smooth driving style was a boost amid the big understeer challenge of Shanghai's many long corners, which in turn worsened the graining.

Piastri's defence at the start cost Russell momentum and position

LENNON/FORMULA1

Norris, with his higher-energy style that involves more regular stabs at the wheel through corner entry – overloading the fronts and requiring a very rearward aerodynamic balance set-up – was in a bind. He was regularly rapid through the first sector, but this would ask more of the Pirelli C4 softs in qualifying. In overstressing the rubber, he had to grapple with time-bleeding snaps that put him back in the pack for the sprint race (where he finished eighth) and meant he was edged to second place for the GP grid by Mercedes driver George Russell. But that was already a sign that, in adjusting mechanical balance, as well as shifting aero balances rearwards to protect the left-front amid the graining issue, McLaren was rebounding.

Hamilton would start the GP in fifth – his best Q3 run scrappier around Ferrari's set-up changes – with Max Verstappen wrestling his Red Bull to fourth. Neither would be a factor in the victory contest.

At the start, polesitter Piastri did much of the work that won him the race. Russell made a fine

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

RETAMAL/AFP

Having earlier kept Leclerc at bay, Russell chased Norris at the close

getaway and tried a speculative look to the start of the Turns 1-2-3-4 'snail', as the race organisers call this part of the track. But Piastri blocked him off, which sapped Russell's momentum and Norris seized second around the outside. Norris then chased Piastri across the leader's 14-lap opening stint of the 56-tour contest – never falling above 2.1 seconds, even with the dirty air coming off the other MCL39. This really came to bear just before the pitstops, when Norris dropped to 2.5s back.

When Piastri pitted to swap medium tyres for the hards, Russell did likewise. And here Norris's initial struggles with understeer and the new track surface bit hard, since it meant staying out for an extra lap while Piastri was serviced. The undercut was worth "two to three seconds", said Stella, and so Russell was able to erase the 2.5s deficit he'd faced before the pitstops. Norris came out of the pitlane just ahead of the Mercedes but fractionally behind Lance Stroll's yet-to-stop Aston Martin. But, to avoid wrecking the tyres immediately, all the drivers had to hold back in the opening 'snail' before the rubber was worked to its best operating window. And here, with Norris pinched behind Stroll, Russell powered around the outside on his bedded-in hard tyres, regaining second.

But only briefly. Norris was soon past Stroll and then immediately in DRS range to Russell. Norris got back ahead with a thrilling run into Turn 1 on lap 18, by which point Piastri was 3.1s up the road.

Now on the hard tyres, Norris "finally had some front" and he was able to push on, saying afterwards that his "pace was a lot stronger". Also coming into play was Norris's assessment of how Piastri's driving style was treating the tyres, so he adapted to brake slightly later, but also then give it a fraction longer before hitting the gas to aid tyre life.

As the track really rubbered in, that aided Norris further and also changed the complexion of the race. The frontrunning teams were watching Stroll "giving information that the hard was quite consistent", according to Isola. The Aston Martin had started on the hards and was putting in times that made a switch of strategy likely. Isola, who'd predicted a two-stop affair, thought it was "quite at the limit" of feasibility. But, in Piastri's words, after "about 10 to 15 laps on the hard", it was clear that there would be just a single round of stops. Norris started to close on Piastri as they stretched the second stint well north of 30 laps. By contrast, the mediums used for the 19-lap sprint had been close to 100% wear on some cars.

With a streak of fastest laps as the middle phase started, Norris was finally getting the upper hand in sector two. The gap, as high as 4.3s on lap 21, fell to 2.4s – then gradually grew again as Piastri also lifted his pace. McLaren had ordered the leader to push on too because, said Stella, "we needed to open more gaps on Russell and the Ferraris".

Once Norris was clear of Russell by five seconds by the end of lap 36, Stella and co allowed the McLaren drivers to "pick up the pace" as they saw fit to decide the race. But on lap 48, Norris reported his brake pedal "going long" – an issue McLaren had spotted in its data since the halfway stage.

The problem was a leak in a component, although Stella said this was not in "the brake line" and didn't give any more details post-race "for IP reasons". It soon stopped Norris applying peak brake pressure in the big stops of Turns 6 and 14, and by the end he was lifting-and-coasting from several hundred metres out from each. It got tense. Norris felt the issue "got critical in the last five laps", but he made it to the end, 9.7s adrift of Piastri, while Russell closed back to 1.3s in third.

Both McLaren drivers reflected that they'd been prevented from showing what they could have done with well-saved tyre life in the closing stages. But, as disappointed as Norris was, he was overall relieved at his turnaround. "A much better race than I was thinking I was going to have," he said.

Charles Leclerc was disqualified from fifth after the race with his Ferrari 1kg underweight (as was Alpine's Pierre Gasly, for the same infraction), with Hamilton excluded from sixth for excess plank wear on his Ferrari. This boosted the fine races for Haas drivers Esteban Ocon and Ollie Bearman (fifth and eighth in the final results), plus Williams pair Alex Albon and Carlos Sainz (seventh and 10th).

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

POWERED BY motorsport STATS

RESULTS ROUND 2/24

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT 23.03.25 / 56 LAPS

POS	DRIVER	TIME	GRID
1	**Oscar Piastri** McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	1h30m55.026s	1
2	**Lando Norris** McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	+9.748s	3
3	**George Russell** Mercedes F1 W16	+11.097s	2
4	**Max Verstappen** Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+16.656s	4
5	**Esteban Ocon** Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+49.969s	11
6	**Andrea Kimi Antonelli** Mercedes F1 W16	+53.748s	8
7	**Alexander Albon** Williams-Mercedes FW47	+56.321s	10
8	**Ollie Bearman** Haas-Ferrari VF-25	+1m01.303s	17
9	**Lance Stroll** Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	+1m10.204s	14
10	**Carlos Sainz** Williams-Mercedes FW47	+1m16.387s	15
11	**Isack Hadjar** Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	+1m18.875s	7
12	**Liam Lawson** Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	+1m21.147s	20
13	**Jack Doohan** Alpine-Renault A525	+1m28.401s	18
14	**Gabriel Bortoleto** Sauber-Ferrari C45	-1 lap/ +10.756s	19
15	**Nico Hulkenberg** Sauber-Ferrari C45	-1 lap/ +20.226s	12
16	**Yuki Tsunoda** Racing Bulls-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	-1 lap/ +23.511s	9
R	**Fernando Alonso** Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	4 laps/ brakes	13
EX	**Charles Leclerc** Ferrari SF-25	+23.211s	6
EX	**Lewis Hamilton** Ferrari SF-25	+25.381s	5
EX	**Pierre Gasly** Alpine-Renault A525	+1m07.195s	16

FASTEST LAP **Norris** 1m35.454s (127.742mph)

F1 SPRINT 19 LAPS (GRID)

1 Hamilton (1); 2 **Piastri** (3); 3 **Verstappen** (2); 4 **Russell** (5); 5 **Leclerc** (4); 6 **Tsunoda** (8); 7 **Antonelli** (7); 8 **Norris** (6); 9 **Stroll** (10); 10 **Alonso** (11)

TYRE COMPOUNDS USED

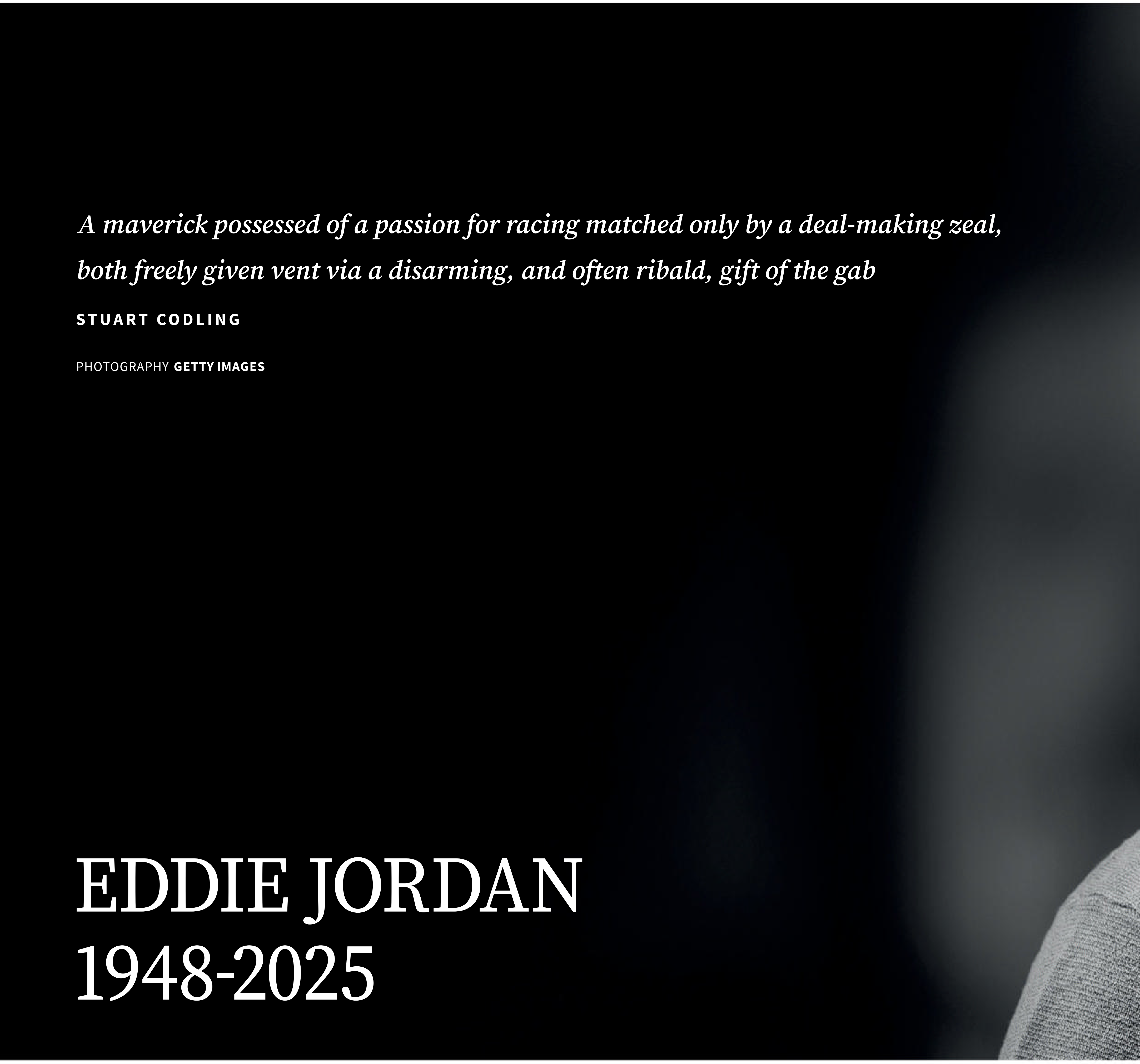
HARD ▼	MEDIUM ▼	SOFT ▼		
C3	C4	C5	INTERMEDIATE	WET

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Norris 44; 2 **Verstappen** 36; 3 **Russell** 35; 4 **Piastri** 34; 5 **Antonelli** 22; 6 **Albon** 16; 7 **Ocon** 10; 8 **Stroll** 10; 9 **Hamilton** 9; 10 **Leclerc** 8.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 McLaren 78; 2 **Mercedes** 57; 3 **Red Bull** 36; 4 **Williams** 17; 5 **Ferrari** 17; 6 **Haas** 14; 7 **Aston Martin** 10; 8 **Sauber** 6; 9 **Racing Bulls** 3; 10 **Alpine** 0.



A maverick possessed of a passion for racing matched only by a deal-making zeal, both freely given vent via a disarming, and often ribald, gift of the gab

STUART CODLING

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

EDDIE JORDAN 1948-2025

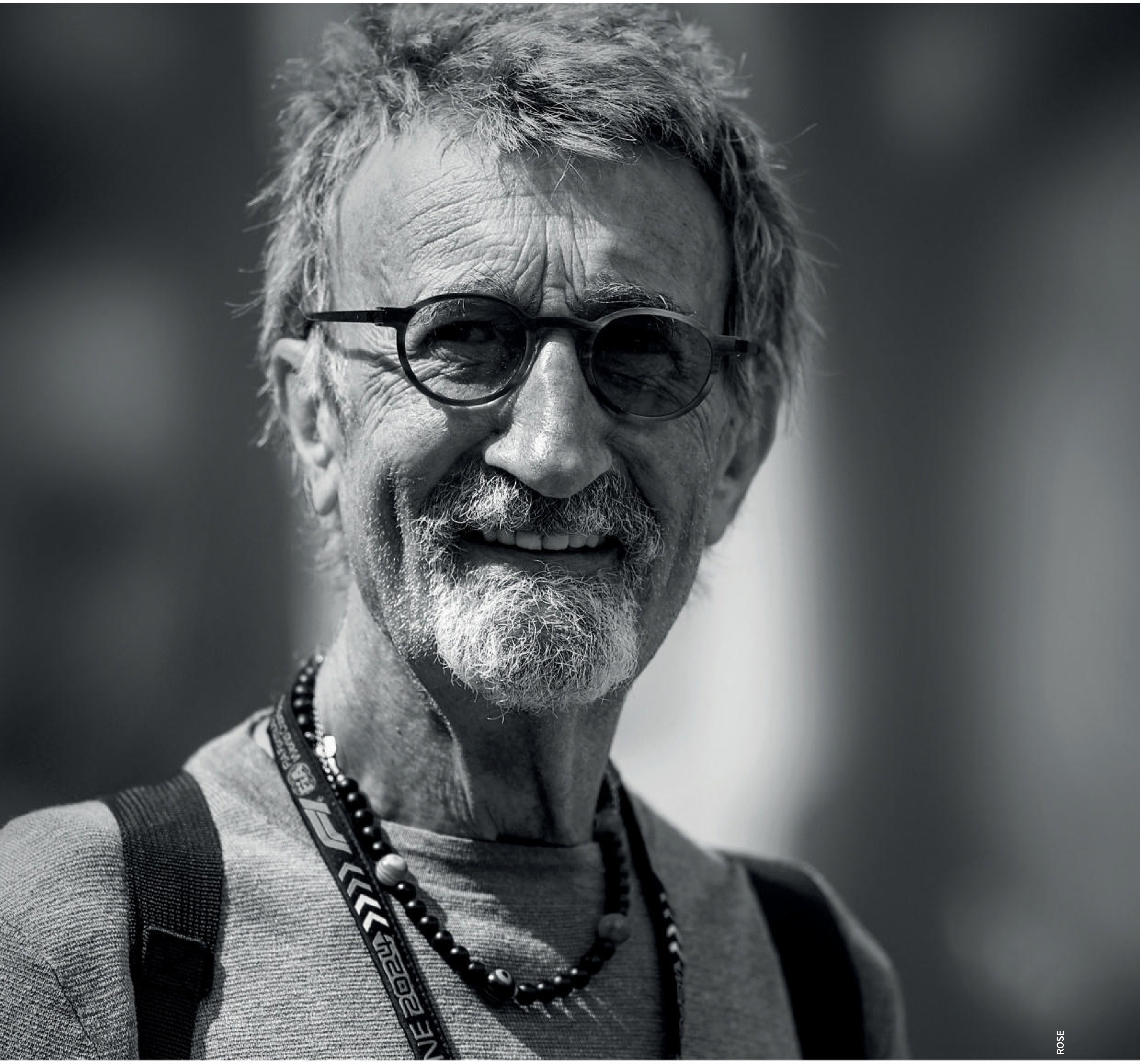
Show, don't tell – a classic rule of storytelling that Edmund Patrick Jordan, who has died aged 76, lived by as he blazed a trail through motor racing. Bank clerk, bartender, carpet salesman: what mattered was what worked. Eddie used to enjoy regaling people with the story of how he got 7-Up sponsorship for his first Formula 1 car because Michael Jackson set his hair on fire.

Like much of the blarney that issued from Eddie's mouth, it wasn't *quite* true – but it was funny and a great story nonetheless.

That blarney was typically spritzed with vulgar verbiage of Anglo-Saxon origin. Those who met this maverick later in life would have been amazed to learn that he had once considered joining the priesthood, or that his first 'proper' job involved counting other people's money rather than blagging and spending it on motor racing.

The pivot point was a kart race at the Belle Vue circuit in St Brelade, Jersey, in 1970. Jordan had temporarily relocated to the island when a strike in Ireland left him needing to earn money elsewhere. It's unlikely that working as a bank clerk would have satisfied his entrepreneurial bent for long, anyway; karting acted as the gateway drug for an obsession with motor racing. Graduating to single-seaters meant Jordan needed to earn more money, and he energetically accumulated small sponsors.

While he raced more with enthusiasm than driving talent, Jordan did win the Duckhams-sponsored, Mondello Park-based Formula Atlantic championship as well as the BP-backed



ROSE

All-Ireland championship, which took in races at Kirkistown, near Bangor on the Ards peninsula. This carried him into the orbit of BMW dealer and Donegal Motor Club co-founder Derek McMahon, who had supported Derek Daly towards Formula 1 and would subsequently do the same with David Kennedy and Tommy Byrne. Eddie leaped at the chance to drive for McMahon alongside Stefan Johansson and Bernard Devaney in the 1979 British F3 Championship. This, though, was the season when ground-effect aerodynamics arrived on the F3 scene, albeit in a very Heath Robinson form. Outpaced by Johansson – and the likes of Chico Serra, Nigel Mansell, Andrea de Cesaris and Mike Thackwell, despite a mid-season upgrade from Chevron to the more effective March 793 – Jordan really proved his worth doubling up as team sponsor-wrangler, fixer and 'gopher'.

> *"It's unlikely that working as a bank clerk would have satisfied his entrepreneurial bent for long"*

Jordan was a keen drummer, passionate about music, so it's perhaps appropriate that his last outing as a professional driver came alongside Pink Floyd manager Steve O'Rourke in an EMKA BMW M1 at Le Mans in 1981. By then, though, he was segueing into team management, running his own British F3 squad on a shoestring from a shed near Silverstone that had once housed »

F3 driver (here in 1980) proved more adept as team fixer

K SUTTON

Brundle's close F3 title defeat in 1983 elevated Jordan's status

PROFESSIONAL SPORT/POPPERFOTO

Herbert's 1987 British F3 title prompted audacious F3000 move

SUTTON

After Alesi lifted F3000 crown in 1989, Jordan's eyes were set on F1

pigs. Eddie Jordan Racing was seldom rolling in money but it made a little go a long way, which was to become a hallmark of Jordan's operations. For all his flamboyance, he retained the bank teller's facility to keep an eye on incomings and outgoings.

Martin Brundle was narrowly beaten by Ayrton Senna to the 1983 British F3 Championship in an EJR-run Ralt RT3/83, transforming Jordan's equipe from outsider to, if not racing royalty, certainly respectability. After running Johnny Herbert to the 1987 British F3 title, Jordan decided that this time he would not let a talent move upwards out of his hands: International F3000 beckoned, even if there was no money to do it.

"There were tribulations on the way, but EJ ducked and dived to become a grand prix winner"

The cover of Autosport's 21 April 1988 issue perfectly sums up Eddie Jordan's approach to racing: Herbert crossing the finishing line at Jerez with his arm up in victory, and a car bare except for an Avon logo on the front-wing endplate and a small Camel sticker on the sidepod. They say that when one door closes, another opens; Eddie was always happy to put his shoulder to the original door if it wasn't properly shut. Camel sponsorship director Duncan Lee had said no, but Jordan had heard enough of a "maybe" in his tone to borrow some stickers from the Camel-sponsored First Racing team and put them on his new Reynard anyway.

When Herbert won that first round – a debut victory for the Reynard 88D too – Jordan persuaded Autosport editor Peter Foubister to celebrate this moment on the cover. 'Foub' was happy to champion a young British talent and race car constructor (ad manager Simon Sanderson was no doubt straight on the phone to Reynard in a bid to sell the centre spread). Eddie, on a similar bent, was knocking on Lee's door with a copy of the magazine in hand: "See what I can do for you…"

Show, don't tell. It was the same when Jordan decided to go to F1, having run Jean Alesi to the F3000 title in 1989. After an attempt to buy Team Lotus with Camel backing fell through, he decided to go his own way – and spent some of his own money, as well as the team's, on building a car. Though he was, to an extent, winging it, he knew attracting sponsorship for such a project would be a challenge, and having a car would lend more credibility than a ring-bound sales presentation. "This was not about talking a carpet dealer into putting a sticker on your Formula Ford car," he wrote in his autobiography *An Independent Man*. "This was commitment on a massive scale that would involve not just your livelihood but the livelihoods of others who would come to depend on you."

Against all odds, Jordan Grand Prix prospered. There were tribulations on the way – the team almost went bankrupt in the first season, despite the neat 191's success on track – but EJ ducked and dived to become a grand prix winner. Commercial headwinds eventually forced Jordan to sell up in 2005 but, despite establishing other business interests, he was never far from the scene. Last year he engineered the high-profile transfer of his Cape Town neighbour Adrian Newey to Aston Martin – the modern incarnation of his old team.

Concurrently, as he would reveal later, Eddie was undergoing treatment for an aggressive prostate and bladder cancer. He was a fighter to the end.

Jordan 191 F1 car revealed sans livery in November 1990

Hill took famous first Jordan F1 victory amid Spa 1998 chaos

SUTTON

Schumacher's 1991 F1 debut for Jordan grabbed headlines

COLOMBO

TRIBUTES

ANDY STEVENSON
Aston Martin sporting director and early Jordan employee

A huge part in my life and the team's life. Without him we certainly wouldn't be where we are now. The way we go racing is what we learned from Eddie. When I first started working for him, it was very tough, but later in life you realised it was because he was competitive, and him being tough was his way of motivating you.

While on the outside he looked like he was just having fun, his whole aim in life was to get the most out of people. That was why we were a team that could achieve results that people felt we really shouldn't with what we had available to us. If you were prepared to give your all, he would back you all the way.

MARTIN BRUNDLE
1983 British F3 runner-up with Jordan; F1 in 1996

He was a force of nature, such a character. Sometimes he'd talk in riddles and you weren't quite sure what he really meant. And then all of a sudden he could be incredibly serious about a question that involved business.

He was probably the last of the mavericks. Those who could go from junior racing into F1 and survive somehow. Only Eddie's personality and style could have made that happen.

The more I think about him having died, the more I'm getting sad. We should all have our obituary done while we're alive at an agreed point, because you say all these wonderful things about people and you think, 'I should have said that to his face'.

JOHNNY HERBERT
Jordan's 1987 British F3 champion; F3000 in 1988

Every time I saw him, he'd say, 'I made you!', which goes all the way back to F3. He had been close to the F3 title and was desperate to win it. When it did happen, you could tell in his body language the lift it gave.

He had a strength – the people he had were a part of the family. He had an ability to get the best out of you. It was all the little ingredients that he took all the way to F1.

He was good at giving drivers opportunities. When Frentzen came it was like a family, like he'd had at Sauber, after the hard time at Williams. You made the driver comfortable. It was a lovely period and it was beautiful to have Eddie in F1.

GARY ANDERSON
Jordan designer, 1991-98, 2002-03

When Eddie persuaded me to design the first Jordan Grand Prix car, I never for one moment thought we would finish the job and race it, let alone have the success we did.

It was only his incredible enthusiasm, persuasiveness and eye for a deal that made it possible.

All of us at Jordan loved getting one over the big boys, especially EJ, who proved that if you're willing to put everything on the line you can achieve incredible things. He was a friend, colleague – and very occasionally an enemy – but also a loveable soul who would go out of his way to help you. EJ, you will be dearly missed.

How familiar will the sight of this become?

HAIYUAN/PADDOCKER/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

HAMILTON'S EARLY FIRST WIN FOR FERRARI

"A masterclass of tyre management." Five words that could put Lewis Hamilton's victory in the sprint race at the Chinese Grand Prix alongside so many of those record 105 GP triumphs. But this was historically different.

It was Riccardo Adami, not Peter Bonnington, delivering the message, which hailed Hamilton's first F1 win for Ferrari, on just the second race weekend after his blockbuster switch from Mercedes. And it represented Hamilton's first ever win in the sprint format.

After claiming 'pole' for the sprint in the glowing Shanghai Friday afternoon running, Hamilton woke up "unusually calm in myself". Unable to decide if this suggested good or ill – "if I'm dormant or just ready" – he embraced it. Arriving back at his car for the start "earlier than normal", with trainer Angela Cullen back at his side these days, Hamilton focused on extra time "talking to the engineers from the car" and enjoying the 'pole' view for the first time since Hungary 2023.

At the start, Hamilton quickly moved right to fend off Max Verstappen's better getaway, with Oscar Piastri already threatening from third. Remaining first was a key part of Hamilton's win – he avoided the big dirty air factor to help manage his tyre graining.

He soaked up considerable Verstappen pressure for 10 of the race's 19 laps. Then, having gently bedded in his medium tyres, he gapped the Dutchman's Red Bull and pulled away from Piastri once the McLaren driver, who went on to win the GP on Sunday, was into second. Hamilton's winning margin was a commanding 6.9s. This was just six days after his Australian GP struggles to 10th.

Hamilton credited a return to a set-up he'd enjoyed in Bahrain testing, as well as being more proactive in demanding its use with Ferrari's engineers, to being key to his turnaround.

Post-race, he hit out at "yapping" critics and "a lot of people" who'd "underestimated the steep climb it is to get into a new team". But his celebrations were controlled overall.

"Obviously it's a sprint race, it's not the main race," he said afterwards. "But even just to get that is a good stepping stone to where I'm working towards."

For starters, that's GP win 106 and the first in Ferrari scarlet.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Getting out front was key to managing tyres

HENGWEI/CHINA NEWS SERVICE/VCG/GETTY IMAGES

NICHOLLS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

CONCORDE IS SIGNED, BUT FIA STALLING

The 11 teams that will form the Formula 1 grid in 2026 have put their signatures to a new Concorde Agreement that will define the championship's commercial terms for the next five years.

The incoming Cadillac team will front up a $450million anti-dilution fee, while the yearly cost cap will be raised to $220m following the inclusion of further elements that were previously situated outside of the restrictions on spending. The terms with commercial rights holder Formula One Management (FOM) have been agreed, but the agreement is now waiting on the FIA to agree to the terms set out.

There is therefore a delay on finalising the terms of the FIA's involvement and on additional elements such as superlicence fees. It is currently unclear when the FIA will co-sign the agreement, despite its assertions that "the governance aspect of the 2026 Concorde Agreement between FIA and FOM is nearing completion", with president Mohammed Ben Sulayem believed to be holding up progress to force F1 into making concessions to the FIA to get a deal over the line.

To strengthen F1's position, CEO Stefano Domenicali (above) has signed a new five-year contract to continue his leadership of the championship.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Norman and Dodds are trying to bring more humans to their league

FORMULA E

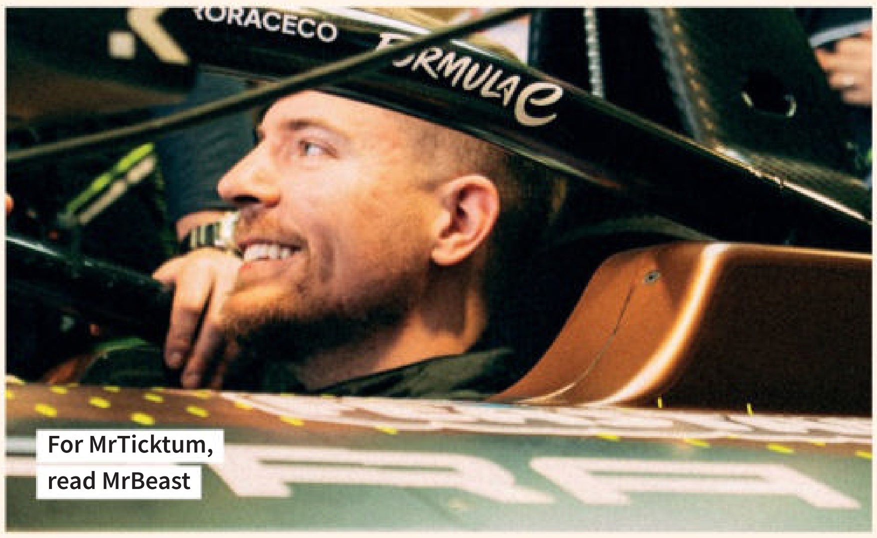
TOGETHER IN ELECTRIC DREAMS

What do you get when you take the biggest YouTube star on the globe, mix in some Draco Malfoy magic and blend in some brand Beckham? The answer, Formula E executives hope, is lasting audience engagement.

Jeff Dodds came on board as CEO in the summer of 2023 and has challenged his team to make Formula E the second most-watched motorsport series in the world. Working alongside chief marketing officer Ellie Norman, Dodds is looking to expand the fanbase – and commercial opportunities – through different channels.

"We are determined to grow, and we won't achieve that ambition by simply fishing in the motorsports pond," said Dodds. "That is a very important pond, but it's also pretty small, so the onus is on us as a business to bring new fans to the sport."

So instead of the motorsport pond, Dodds and Norman cast their line into the wide-open waters of social media. The EVO Sessions, held in Miami last month, brought together 11 content creators, including Harry Potter star Tom Felton and Brooklyn Beckham, and gave them two days out on track – before the influencers posted about their experience to a combined social following of a quarter of a billion. YouTube star MrBeast, with an unrivalled 371million subscribers, was also on site, creating his own short and long-form content with the Kiro team.



For MrTicktum, read MrBeast

"There's lots of different ways of looking at it," added Dodds about growing Formula E as a business. "I tend to look at it as the overall growth in value of the organisation over time. And to get that, you've got to be growing your fanbase, your media reach, your sponsorship revenue and partnership revenue.

"When you're out talking to partners and trying to encourage them to spend more money with us, they're looking for big brand points such as EVO Sessions, MrBeast's project or our upcoming DRIVER documentary. The total value of the business is growing pretty significantly. We don't publicly talk about our revenues, but we're in a really good trajectory at the moment."

For Norman, it is about making sure such events are carried out even if it means growing a thick skin against negative responses. "The last thing we can do is stand still," she said. "It has to be about challenging the status quo, and to do that in a way that is respectful to the DNA of the sport. But that is going to come with people feeling sort of uncomfortable."

MARK MANN-BRYANS

GIRLS' KART FUNDING

As part of its continued partnership with F1 Academy, Charlotte Tilbury has committed to supporting free karting sessions for young girls. As well as funding the Girls Karting Academy, the beauty brand has launched a scholarship, with both initiatives aimed at driving up female participation in the sport.

ALPINE RACE TICKETS

Alpine has teamed with viagogo in a partnership based around the squad's allocation of race tickets being made available on the worldwide platform. As an F1 team, Alpine has a right-to-buy ticket inventory, which will be distributed directly through viagogo, and StubHub across North America.

F1 VODKA PARTNER

Formula 1 has announced its first-ever official vodka partner. In October 2024, Liberty Media agreed a 10-year partnership with LVMH, in a deal reportedly worth $1billion, and Belvedere vodka now joins its other brands – Moet & Chandon, TAG Heuer and Louis Vuitton – in F1.

THE BUSINESS FORMULA

Scan the QR code to sign up for the Autosport Business newsletter. Every Wednesday morning our F1 business correspondent, Mark Mann-Bryans, will piece together the latest from the world of motorsport delivered directly to your inbox.

INSIDER

Haas can fix its 2025 problem, thinks Jake Boxall-Legge

A friend joked to me recently that, since we're in an odd-numbered year, it's not a surprise that Haas has dropped slightly in 2025. In recent years, it has been thus: 2024 was a strong year that undid many of the mistakes of 2023, where it had a car that chewed through tyres like a stick of gum. The American team enjoyed a good 2022 to kick off the current regulations after being hermetically sealed to the back of the order in 2021. The 2020 campaign was something of an outlier in the pattern of auspicious even-numbered years since the car was slow, albeit after picking up from a 2019 machine that regressed dramatically through the season.

The salient point in this pattern is that 2018 remains its high-water mark, when Haas placed fifth in the constructors' championship after a solid-but-unspectacular 2017 and a stunning debut year in 2016. Perhaps the small size of the team rather contributes to its on-and-off fortunes...

In truth, the 2025 car isn't all that bad, but it has a critical flaw in high-speed corners. This wasn't apparent until the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, since the team had followed a similar run plan in Bahrain testing as it had in 2024 in prioritising long runs to understand its interface with the tyres. In Melbourne, bouncing in Turns 9 and 10 upset the car to such an extent that it forced Esteban Ocon to brake twice through the rapid left-right corners simply to stop the car from going outside of the lines. This not only cost him a tenth relative to the next-slowest car on the grid – the Sauber C45 – immediately through those corners, but the time delta continued to rise as Ocon lagged on the run to Turn 11.

Otherwise, it's not all that bad. Up until those corners, the VF-25 of Ocon was only 0.3 seconds down on Lando Norris's chart-topping lap from Q1 down under – but the deficit snowballed into one that ended up at 1.2s by the end of the lap. Without similar corners in China to expose those flaws, the team enjoyed a double points finish – one that was upgraded to fifth and eighth with the Ferrari disqualifications.

Regardless, the car's lack of potency in the high-speed corners and on bumpy track surfaces will hurt until Haas can find a fix. It's likely that these are traits that can be ironed out with floor upgrades. This is an issue that Ferrari came across mid-way through 2024, when its own underbody updates made the car more difficult to handle in corners when the aerodynamic load built up.

"We're still going to have a big problem [in high-speed conditions]," reckoned team principal Ayao Komatsu, stating that the team was going to need more than set-up to dial out those issues. "But when we can operate the car in the way that we want, thanks to the circuit characteristics, [the result in China] is what we can do."

Once the VF-25's issues are smoothed out, it has the drivers to make the most of it. Ocon's qualities are known – he was Pierre Gasly's equal during their two years together at Alpine. When Nico Hulkenberg left for Sauber, taking the Frenchman was an astute move from the American squad; while Ocon carries the reputation of someone who doesn't much care for playing the team game, this has been proven to be largely unfair. With the mantle of de facto team leader, the Norman has offered support to Ollie Bearman to ensure that the Briton's first full season is successful.

Of course, Bearman is going to have his own moments of overdoing it, as any rookie would. But in his handful of races in F1, he's proven to be not only quick, but someone who does not shy away from battling with the more established drivers and ensuring he's upwardly mobile in races. Look at how he bounced back in Australia, too; sure, his FP2 and FP3 crashes and excursions damaged his weekend irreparably but, in the difficult conditions produced by the sporadic downpours, he kept the car on the road.

Under Komatsu, Haas has been a much more focused force. The Japanese was keen not to change too much in his first year in charge of the team, instead ensuring that the squad made the most of its resources scattered across the UK, US and Italy. But he identified areas where it could strengthen, particularly with its trackside team, and the improvements through the weekend in China showed that the new recruits have the ability to influence the progression from Friday to Saturday.

> ***"In truth, the car isn't all that bad, but it has a critical flaw in high-speed corners"***

It won't be the work of a moment to clean up Haas's key weaknesses in 2025, but the encouraging aspect is that the team has at least identified them and has set its sights on fixing them, rather than bailing on its development and choosing to focus on 2026. Even though the current regulations won't be relevant by next year, it might still learn something by finding a path to alleviate those issues.

That the team already has a healthy score on the board is a bonus at this time of year, but it would do well to end the cycle of biennial waxing and waning.

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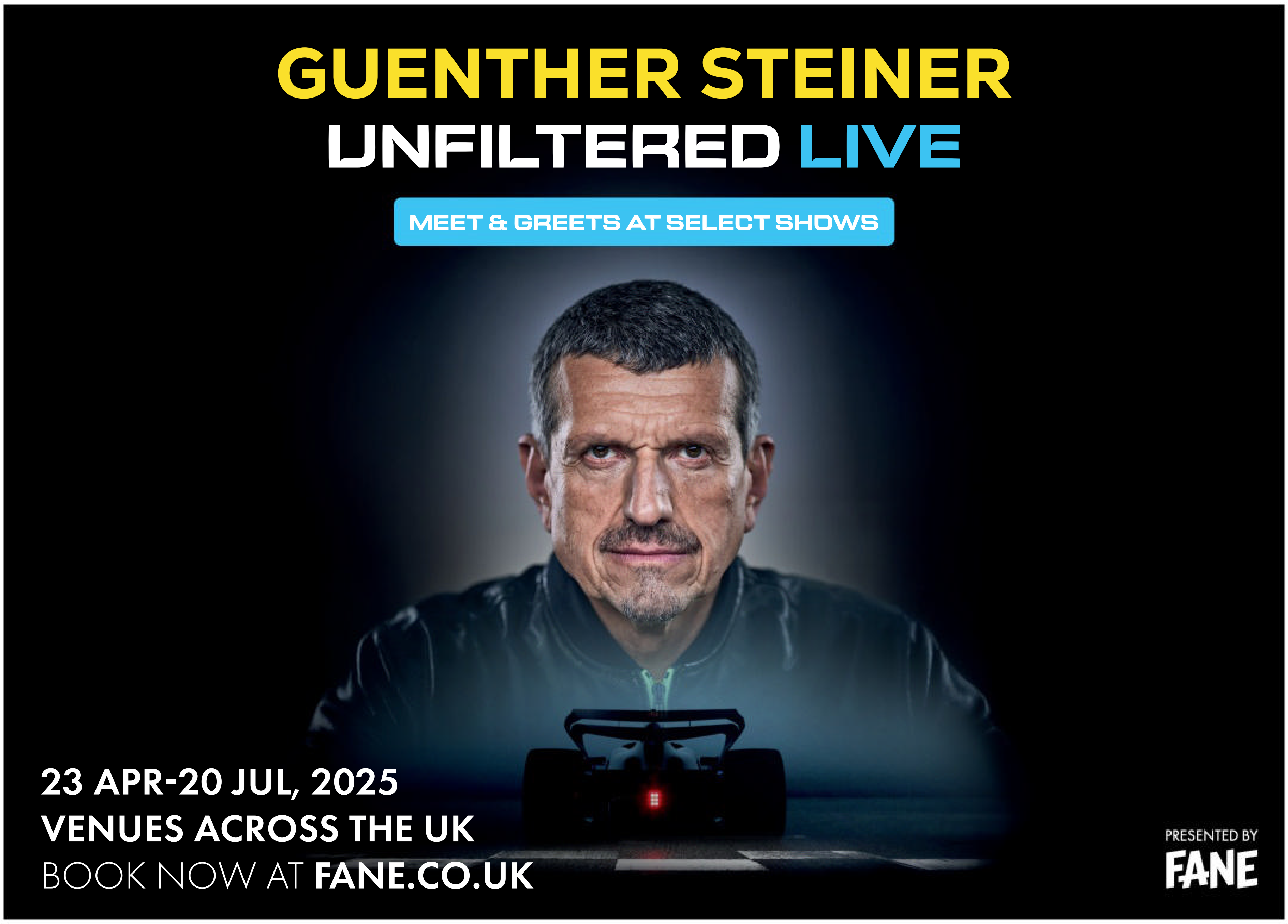
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All smiles and hugs before things went pear-shaped

ILLMAN

INSIDER

Lewis is on a long road at Ferrari, argues Mark Mann-Bryans

If Lewis Hamilton is to win an eighth Formula 1 drivers' championship following his move to Ferrari, he is experienced enough to know it was always likely to be a case of playing the long game. "Rome wasn't built in a day," he said recently when asked about a potential title charge in 2025. Hamilton certainly discovered in China that it will be a marathon and not a sprint to simultaneously become F1's most successful champion, while also bringing the glory days back to Maranello.

Ahead of the season, it seemed obvious that Hamilton needed a fresh challenge after winning 84 grands prix and six titles with a Mercedes team that has long since peaked in the hybrid era. Before the first race in Australia, Hamilton certainly seemed to embrace his move to Ferrari as he showed a renewed vigour for a man preparing for his 19th consecutive year in F1.

Fans flocked en masse to catch just a glimpse of Hamilton in a red car for the first time on a cold, foggy January morning at Fiorano, Ferrari's own track, while his mother and father were both there to witness the occasion.

He had already broken the internet by this stage, the first image of Hamilton decked out in a red racesuit becoming the most liked F1 photograph in Instagram history in a matter of hours. He even launched his own TikTok account and 'appeared' in one of his favourite movies when he was added to the cast of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* with the aid of CGI.

Once the Australian Grand Prix weekend got under way last month, however, Hamilton would have soon realised that there is no time for any days off if he and new team-mate Charles Leclerc are to challenge his two former squads, McLaren and Mercedes, at the business end of the grid. Changeable weather conditions and a number of safety cars during the race could not disguise the fact that Ferrari was not on the same level as the frontrunners – so it was then something of a shock to see Hamilton arrive at Shanghai and stick his car on pole position for the first sprint race of the season.

He never really looked troubled in taking the sprint victory and the eight points that come with it – but then the weekend fell apart. Following tinkering on the car between the sprint race and GP qualifying, the newly discovered Ferrari pace fell away faster than a set of soft tyres around the Shanghai International Circuit. During the race itself, Hamilton and Leclerc had contact with one another, could do nothing to close in on the cars ahead of them, and saw a split strategy – Hamilton two-stopping to Leclerc's single change of tyres – fail to bring about a recovery. To top it all, both cars were then expelled from the race result for silly technical oversights that should not be allowed to happen in the ultra-modern world of F1 racing.

Hamilton went into the new season looking rejuvenated and excited to land such a prestigious move at the twilight of his record-breaking career but, despite that sprint success, the challenges in front of him are now laid bare.

Ferrari has been thereabouts in recent seasons, winning GPs and emerging as a contender for the constructors' championship last year. However, it has not won the title since 2008 and is 18 years without a drivers' championship, and that has not always been down to the machinery in the hands of a talented pool of racers. Strange strategic calls and unfathomable derailing decisions, which were once almost as commonplace at Ferrari as the prancing horse or an ever-increasing pressure on the current incumbents to deliver, have largely been addressed under the stewardship of Fred Vasseur, but they still slip through the cracks.

> ***"He never really looked troubled in taking the sprint victory – but then the weekend fell apart"***

Hamilton's radio tete-a-tete with race engineer Riccardo Adami throughout the Australian GP, hitting out at the media "yapping" surrounding his start to the season, and the disqualification at Shanghai outweighed that sliver of success in the sprint race. "There's going to be swings and roundabouts, right? There's going to be ups and downs," Hamilton said in China, but will he still be enjoying the ride if those old Ferrari woes continue to resurface?

INSIDER

Pat Symonds mulls set-up options and the wisdom of Jochen Rindt

This month we've had two interesting questions to answer. Our first questioner, as a club racer, is used to a range of set-up adjustments for everything from historic cars to more modern single-seaters and GT3 cars. They ask what are the range of set-ups for a Formula 1 car for different circuits, different conditions, and what is typically changed from Friday to Saturday?

Parc ferme and the lack of unofficial testing have fundamentally changed the way a team approaches a race weekend. Prior to these restrictions being imposed, the way an F1 team would approach a grand prix was not dissimilar to your experience in club racing. There would generally have been a test prior to the race weekend and, although this would have been at a different venue to the race, the circuit would have been chosen to have similar characteristics to the next GP track. A number of set-up variations would be tried as well as new components, both aerodynamic and suspension related. In addition, as there were few tyre restrictions in those days, several compounds and constructions may have been evaluated.

From this matrix of tests, a number of candidate solutions would be taken to the next race and evaluated against a baseline set-up during free practice on Friday. Along with trying these new parts, the driver would be feeding back to the engineer their feeling about the car. Using this human response and the data available, the engineers would fine tune the set-up, mainly using the tools of springs, anti-roll bars, ride heights, cambers and aerodynamic settings. At one time, there was even a 30-minute session on Sunday morning, something that was particularly useful if sudden inclement weather prevailed as it did in Melbourne this year.

If it did rain, there were no restrictions on what could be changed, although changeable conditions often led, as they might do today, to compromises having to be made.

These days are somewhat different. The restrictions on circuit testing have led to a huge investment in ensuring that as much optimisation as possible is done before the car even runs. Simulators' increasing sophistication has elevated them to a position where they are now an engineering tool as much, if not more, than they are a driver training tool.

Teams arrive at a circuit with most of the variables already fixed and maybe just a couple of minor checks to be made. For example, a lower downforce setting may be better for racing but worse for qualifying, and the two solutions may be run to ensure that the physical test arrives at similar conclusions to the simulator test, thereby allowing better decisions to be made as to which to adopt for the weekend.

With this in mind, you might ask 'what's left to do?' and the answer is simple: tyre evaluation. The current F1 tyre is extremely sensitive to track temperature, car set-up, the energy imposed on it by the circuit characteristics and the driving style. So the majority of free practice these days is spent trying to optimise for best tyre performance, both over a single lap and longer runs indicative of the race situation. The general pattern of a weekend is to spend first practice on general evaluation, perhaps some flow-vis and aero tests, the second session looking at both a low fuel qualifying set-up and a high fuel longer run, and the third session to fine tune any leftover problems. Of course, during a sprint weekend even this regime is limited, bringing more jeopardy into the weekend as a whole, something I think is good for the fans.

Our second question is, on the face of it, simpler but got me thinking for a long time: which innovations do you wish F1 hadn't produced? I've often been asked about innovations F1 should be proud of, but never the negative version. Firstly, I have to point out that you can never 'un-invent' something. Human beings' quest for knowledge will always find a means to an end even when the obvious route to that end is stopped, whether it be by regulation or other means. I would also say that there is a total conflict between my passion as an engineer and my passion for the sport. I think though that this conflict resolves in wishing that aerodynamics didn't play such an important part of performance.

> *"You might ask 'what's left to do?' and the answer is simple: tyre evaluation"*

Don't get me wrong, the science of aerodynamics is fascinating and the application challenging, but to repeat Jochen Rindt's words in this very magazine on 23 May 1969, when writing about his opposition to wings: "This could mean that the man in front is actually going slower than you, but you cannot pass him because, after getting near to him, your wings stop working and you cannot go so quickly. This fact spoils racing to quite a large extent." Not much has changed, has it?

Want to ask Pat a tech question for a future issue? Let us know on autosport@autosport.com

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READY FOR HIS FINAL EXAM

Lando Norris has done his homework. He's confident he knows what he needs to do to take the next step and win the world championship

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

The Shanghai International Circuit, 20 March 2025, 2.12pm: “Maybe he was joking?”

That was Max Verstappen, incredulous that Lando Norris could have uttered a public complaint about the handling of his dominant McLaren Formula 1 car.

The Jeddah Corniche Circuit, 8 March 2024, 10.46pm: “Max!?”

And that was Norris, stunned that a Red Bull driver could have any complaint about the ride quality of their car, dominant at the time, at that fearsomely fast street track.

The two scenes handily illustrate the turnaround in the fortunes of these two still-friendly F1 rivals. Where Verstappen had entered 2024 as the favourite to seal last year’s world title, now Norris holds the tag. There are key differences, of course, but that’s exactly why we’ve posed the question we have on our cover: Is Norris going to be the 2025 world champion?

Succeeding in this quest would make Norris the title successor to Verstappen – the usurper tale woven through F1 history. It’s an elite club that 25-year-old Norris is trying to join. But he’s certainly got the swagger...

Off-track, Norris doesn’t lack confidence at the highest level of motorsport and the many trappings it provides. But his standing in the F1 paddock is a far cry from the arrogance our description might imply – and rightly so. Norris is a fierce self-critic. His verbal flagellation following every small error across the past few years is often tough to take in, such is its extent. But to mistake such criticism for weakness is to misunderstand Norris. His intense honesty is his strength.

And now that he’s started an F1 campaign as the favourite for the first time following those four breakthrough wins in 2024, we’re keen to hear how the man himself feels about the very positive change to his circumstances, which he shares with McLaren, for this season.

To the Chinese Grand Prix, then – four days on from what at the time of writing remains Norris’s most impressive F1 win, in the 2025 Australia season opener. In Melbourne, Norris saw off his home hero team-mate – Oscar Piastri – for the critical pole position. He led through the early stages when Verstappen had slunk ahead of the second McLaren, absorbing the inevitably relentless pressure from the Dutchman until Red Bull’s car weakness forced a rare wet-weather crack for the world champion. Then Piastri surged back, only to damage his tyres in the pursuit – rendering moot a minor McLaren team orders situation. Both McLarens were off in the gravel when the rain returned, but Norris held on just enough to keep the lead, then beat Verstappen home in a tense late shootout.

That pressure from Piastri, plus beating Verstappen in slippery circumstances where the four-time champion has few peers in the F1 pack, positions that as Norris’s best win yet. It even trumped leading from start to finish in Abu Dhabi last year ahead of the Ferrari of Carlos Sainz, to seal McLaren’s first constructors’ title in 26 years and deny the Italian team its first crown since 2008.

So, has Norris started 2025 driving better than he did at the end of 2024? Or was that just more of the brilliant same? “I think the majority of it is a continuation,” he replies while seated at a table in McLaren’s Shanghai hospitality unit, looking out on the venue’s giant paddock pond. Piastri is speaking to *The Times* on an adjacent table »

Right: Norris ably absorbed pressure from wet-weather maestro Verstappen in Melbourne season-opener

Below right: rivalry remains friendly between the reigning world champion and 2025 title favourite Norris

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WEST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

MARIO RENZI / FORMULA1/GETTY IMAGES

A relaxed-looking Norris acknowledges the pressure he is under but reckons he's got pretty good at shrugging it off

– Fleet Street's interest a sure sign that McLaren is the story of the season so far.

"Like, I feel like I drove some very good races last year," Norris continues, in his charmingly rambling style. "But I was potentially a little bit more inconsistent. But, on the whole, I still drove a very good year last year. In terms of pace and stuff, it was always very strong. My biggest strength is kind of my qualifying pace and those kind of things. But I definitely have times when I've performed very well in certain areas better than others. I've never just been as all-rounded as I needed to be.

"I think what was a strong point from Australia was communication – strategy, awareness of the race, awareness of racing situations, tyre preservation. Just thoughts and processes of executing a good race. Everything was very much in control. And then dealing with the pressure and all those things – start, restarts, a lot of things to kind of all put together. And I think at different moments last year, bits were good, but never kind of consistently all together enough. And this was all together.

"Really, I was quickest in [Melbourne] FP1 and quite easily could have been quickest in FP2 and FP3 if I'd just crossed the line. Pole, race win. So, for me, it was like a perfect weekend. Speaking with the team through the race and just being a bit more on it with those situations was an improvement. But probably the biggest thing is how relaxed I am. My level of focus and chillness is helping me, I think, a good amount. That I'm not stressing too much about things and I'm just focused doing the job I've got to do."

This does jar with something Norris has always insisted: that he needs the pressure of a qualifying or race session to produce his best work behind the wheel. But, concurrently, it represents how McLaren's improved car form can raise levels elsewhere within its team.

A theme of our time with Norris in China is how he organically touches on topics we wanted to discuss anyway. After all, even to those watching from half a world away, he looked supremely relaxed and confident through the chaos of the Melbourne event. It's an assessment with which he agrees. "I think so," Norris replies when asked whether he feels as chilled as he looks doing battle for F1's biggest prize.

There were times during his long-shot chase of Verstappen's 2024 crown when that different type of pressure seemed to seep into Norris's persona. His lengthy answers became edgier. Then it was relief flooding through when Verstappen ended their title battle with that brilliant victory in the wet Brazil race, where, in contrast to his Melbourne might, Norris cracked.

This time, however, he appears to be taking it all in his stride. A consequence, no doubt, of McLaren's 2024 title challenging form actually being a year ahead of the team's optimistic schedule to becoming a consistent F1 frontrunner.

"The thing is, I'm very aware of all of it," says the 2016 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner. "I'm very aware of more eyes, more expectation, more nerves, more pressure. Am I more nervous? Probably. Do I feel like there's more pressure? Yes. Am I aware of all of these things? Yes. But I think the simple thing is: is it affecting me in any way, especially a bad way? I'd say no. It's not like I don't think of all of these things, it's just I'm probably a bit better at dealing with all of it and trying to not think of it and almost not deal with it, is what I'm saying.

"I overthink and I think of a lot of different situations – whether they're good or bad. Sometimes I just don't need to. It's a waste of energy and capacity thinking of things I don't need to. So, now I just try to have the knowledge of how I can chill and know that when I'm going into my car, I'm going to go out and I'm just going to do a good job. »

Norris (here after seeing off home hero Piastri for pole) describes the Melbourne weekend as "perfect"

"I've done my work, I've done my revision – I've done my homework, let's say. Now I just need to go out and do the exam. I don't need to stress about, 'Have I done enough, have I done this enough, have I done that enough, did I think of that?' I'm just confident that I've done my work, now I can go out and drive. And I can also just enjoy the interim part. And, for me, the more relaxed I can be in any situation, the better I perform."

Our Shanghai setting is revealing for Norris's 2025 campaign. The point that had Verstappen so sceptical in the opening lines had been uttered just two hours earlier, when Norris claimed in the pre-event press conference that the McLaren MCL39 is "still extremely difficult to drive" and "doesn't suit my driving style at all".

What this means is the way Norris prefers a strong front end at corner entry, which gels with his high-energy driving style that loads up the front tyres and leaves him needing to hang onto the rear to maintain speed and critical tyre life. It's a trait that requires considerable adaptation with the current ground-effect designs, but for the McLaren package it goes back further.

When Daniel Ricciardo raced for McLaren in 2021 and 2022, one of the most significant handling gripes the Australian had was a big struggle with stability on corner entry. And while that was specifically related to Ricciardo's intense and specific preference for late braking, it shows that, while Norris doesn't like all of McLaren's car mannerisms, he has a history of dealing with them well.

The difference this time is that he's stopped pestering McLaren to deliver his ideal front-end sensation on corner entry. It can't, because the team's aerodynamicists have identified how this might make the car more unstable in other areas – such as low-speed turns or in windy conditions.

"It's not like just suddenly now I've thought of that and lent on that way," Norris insists. "I'm just not fantasising about the idea of, 'but if the car was way better here [I could do even better]'. I'm still pushing them for 'I want a bit more of this and I want a bit more of that'. I'm just not fantasising about, 'What if I had that?'

"At the end of the day, I've always known and always been more of, 'I've just got to drive the car that I've been given'. And that's not a bad thing, because that's every driver's job. It's just to drive the car that they're given. But it's being more open to trying different driving styles and all those different things that I've not necessarily grown up doing. I've not grown up being the best at driving in certain ways. But over the last couple of years, I've found more ways to be able to adapt and change driving styles when I need to. And I think then that's allowed me to be a better driver."

Here we've handily arrived at another of our burning questions, to follow up on how Norris had insisted in the aftermath of his Melbourne win that "me and Oscar pushing each other in qualifying yesterday allowed us to get one and a half, one tenth more" and that "it's not just about the car".

This was to become the overriding theme of the Shanghai weekend, too. Piastri started by far the stronger McLaren driver, leading the way as the team's sprint qualifying run plan contributed to Norris blowing what was set to be the pole lap that went to Lewis Hamilton. Piastri then fought his way past Verstappen to finish second in Hamilton's first race win for Ferrari, while Norris wallowed in the pack, lacking the pace to initially even fight the Aston Martin of Lance Stroll.

But, having rescued the Shanghai final point, Norris started to climb back to his team-mate's level. Around mechanical balance adjustments such as anti-roll bar tweaks and other set-up changes that set his aerodynamic platform further »

FIA Formula 1
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Left: fierce competitiveness between two top talents makes McLaren stronger as a team, reckons Norris...

Below left: ...while each driver admits to addressing their weaknesses by taking a direct lesson from the other

towards the rear axle, Norris qualified third for the Chinese GP. Piastri took pole, with Mercedes driver George Russell in between the two McLarens.

The key to this gain – and how Norris made positive race progress that was good enough to pressure Piastri for the lead, before McLaren's late brake problem called an early end to the chase – was how Norris learned from Piastri.

The Australian has a much smoother driving style; he's rarely snapping at the wheel. At Shanghai, where the numerous long corners cause considerable tyre graining, Norris's many more stabs at the wheel in loading the fronts meant Piastri "was having less graining than Lando", according to McLaren team principal Andrea Stella. He revealed that Norris "needed to pick up something from Oscar" in terms of adjusting to a smoother driving style in those challenging long corners on the Shanghai layout.

And this is how Norris explains that process – one that also works in reverse at every race across the McLaren garage. Piastri will even say there have already been moments where he's "had to try and look at things from how Lando's driven and apply them myself" when asked, following his Chinese GP victory, to describe how closely they're working together.

"The thing is, every driver has strengths and weaknesses," Norris begins. "And, really, the most simple way to explain it is that he does some things that I see on the data and I'm like, 'Damn that's pretty good'. And I try it and maybe the car performs better at doing that driving style or braking that way or accelerating that way or doing that line.

"So, it's more that when you've got someone who is pushing the limits so much, but is a different person, they can get the limit of the car in slightly different ways. And I think one thing is just acknowledging that. The second thing is being able to try it and do it yourself – and that's a much harder thing to be able to do.

"I think that it takes a good driver to be able to do that. But we're *both* able to do that. So, then we're always trying to come up with another way to kind of push the boundary and come up with another way of driving that corner even quicker.

"You're always trying to improve in certain corners that little bit more. But we always have the ability to recognise that, see it, and go out and do it. And sometimes it's harder to do than others. Sometimes a slow-speed corner – because it's a bit more technical – can be a bit trickier to adapt to that braking style that he's doing or whatever. But pretty damn quickly you can go out and do it.

"When you're kind of constantly trying to go, 'OK, what can I do now that's that bit more?', 100% you get more out of each other as a package. And 100% you get more out of one very, very, very good driver with no good team-mate doing it our way, than you will just with one good driver. I also think that's why we make a difference. Because I probably won't be able to do it alone, Oscar wouldn't be able to do it alone. We'd be able to fight Max alone, but you're always going to be stronger as a team."

In China, Verstappen wasn't the only driver wryly pondering McLaren's strong start to the season. Russell had also playfully suggested that "their car is definitely capable of winning every race and their car should win every race, but I don't think they will win every race this year".

Russell had said (ultimately only slightly inaccurately, thanks to Sainz's Singapore GP win) in the aftermath of the 2023 Bahrain season opener that Red Bull should "win every single race this season", showing again how far things have swung for McLaren. But it also highlights the differences in the two predictions.

First, Verstappen's pedigree is clear. Give him the best car and he will mercilessly »

Strong communication – "thoughts and processes of executing a good race" – cited as key to Oz win

deliver the title. For Norris, simply for his current status as championship hopeful, the same can't be said. And then there is how, objectively speaking, the Briton makes more mistakes – however tiny – even with an excellent car. Norris would readily agree with such an assessment, and indeed, he will.

But, at the same time, Piastri's high level means Norris is playing a different and much harder game to Verstappen, who for so long has enjoyed undisputed top dog status at Red Bull. Norris is right to say that this makes McLaren better than the rest, but it makes his 2025 title challenge harder.

So, as we gesture to "the man to your left", who does Norris view as his closest title rival this term? Is it indeed Piastri? Or does what Verstappen produced in Australia prove that he can never be discounted, even as the chaser this time?

"Yeah, I mean, I would never doubt Max," Norris replies. "But I think everyone probably expected a little bit more from Ferrari. I feel like they expected more from themselves. And I expect them to be competition. We had a very good weekend in Melbourne, but Max was still right on me. And that's not *just* because he's an incredible driver in those conditions – their car is still pretty damn good.

"You need both. And Red Bull have a pretty decent car and a very, very good driver. There's no other way they'd be able to compete against us if that's not the case. So, I think Red Bull and Max, we can never doubt them. As a team, probably a bit more Ferrari just because they've got two drivers up there consistently. And I mean, we'd expect Lewis to be up there a bit more consistently than [the now demoted Liam] Lawson, who is just more inexperienced. And the fact that the Red Bull just looks difficult for new guys to adapt to.

"And of course, Oscar. Oscar is very, very quick and already has pushed me a lot over the last couple of years. But I've dealt with that very well and in a fine way. So, I'm not too worried, but I'm aware of how much of a threat he can be. At the same time, the more of a threat he is, the better it is for me in a way because I can learn from those things. And if I'm a good driver, I learn from those things and I improve myself as a driver.

"So, yeah, probably still Red Bull and Max. But I honestly think some races Mercedes will win. I do think that some races Ferrari will win and some races Oscar will probably win. But I'm aware of that. It doesn't make me stressed anymore, worried anymore, because at some point I'm not going to do a perfect quali lap and I'm going to make a mistake and those kind of things will happen. But none of that worries me. It's just I'm still confident we can win the majority."

Regarding Piastri, McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown insists later on during the Shanghai weekend that the 24-year-old is acting no differently behind the scenes now that the team is leading the F1 pack. "He always comes very prepared," Brown explains. "He's got a very cool mindset – always. I think that's one of the things that makes him so strong. Very impressed with Oscar. Have been from day one. Hence signing him up to a longer-term deal so we could have stability in our team and just let everyone focus on racing. I couldn't be happier with my two drivers."

Piastri's new deal – which will run to at least the end of the 2028 season – was announced ahead of this year's curtain raiser. It mirrors Norris's own extension, signed ahead of last year's campaign. With one title already secured in Abu Dhabi last year and the potential for more historic success this season, this pair have the promise to go down as McLaren legends.

But the 2025 season is also far too young to be called a two-horse race just yet. »

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BRYN LENNON/FORMULA 1/GETTY IMAGES

Left: battles with Verstappen in 2023 pushed Norris to his very limit – and the lessons learned are invaluable

Below left: there's a swagger about Norris, a man well at home in his environment and confident in his ability to deliver

As Norris says, Verstappen can never be counted out, Ferrari and Mercedes have already shown the flashes Norris references, and the fallout from the FIA's coming flexi-front-wing clampdown at June's Spanish GP could significantly alter the pecking order anyway.

Yet if it does come down a battle between the McLaren drivers, Norris has a potentially key advantage. His younger team-mate is yet to encounter anything like the challenge Norris had in trying to catch Verstappen in 2024. And, for Norris, the beneficial experience actually started further back – in 2023, when McLaren really leapt up the pack from its long midfield malaise with its upgrade at that season's Austrian GP.

This is why, for Norris, the key to winning the 2025 world title really comes down to that combination of his racing knowledge, gelled with the class-leading package that McLaren has now produced. "The better the car is in a way, the easier everything kind of gets," Norris explains. "Because you can relax more, you can look after the tyres more. Because you're doing that, you can also think of other things a bit more.

"When I was second to Max in like five races [in 2023], the capacity it took for me to perform at that level was almost more [than it is to succeed now in 2025]. Because to get so close to something but not be able to get it, made me work at probably the ultimate limit of what I could do. And that was just very difficult for me to think of everything else as well as what I probably needed to do.

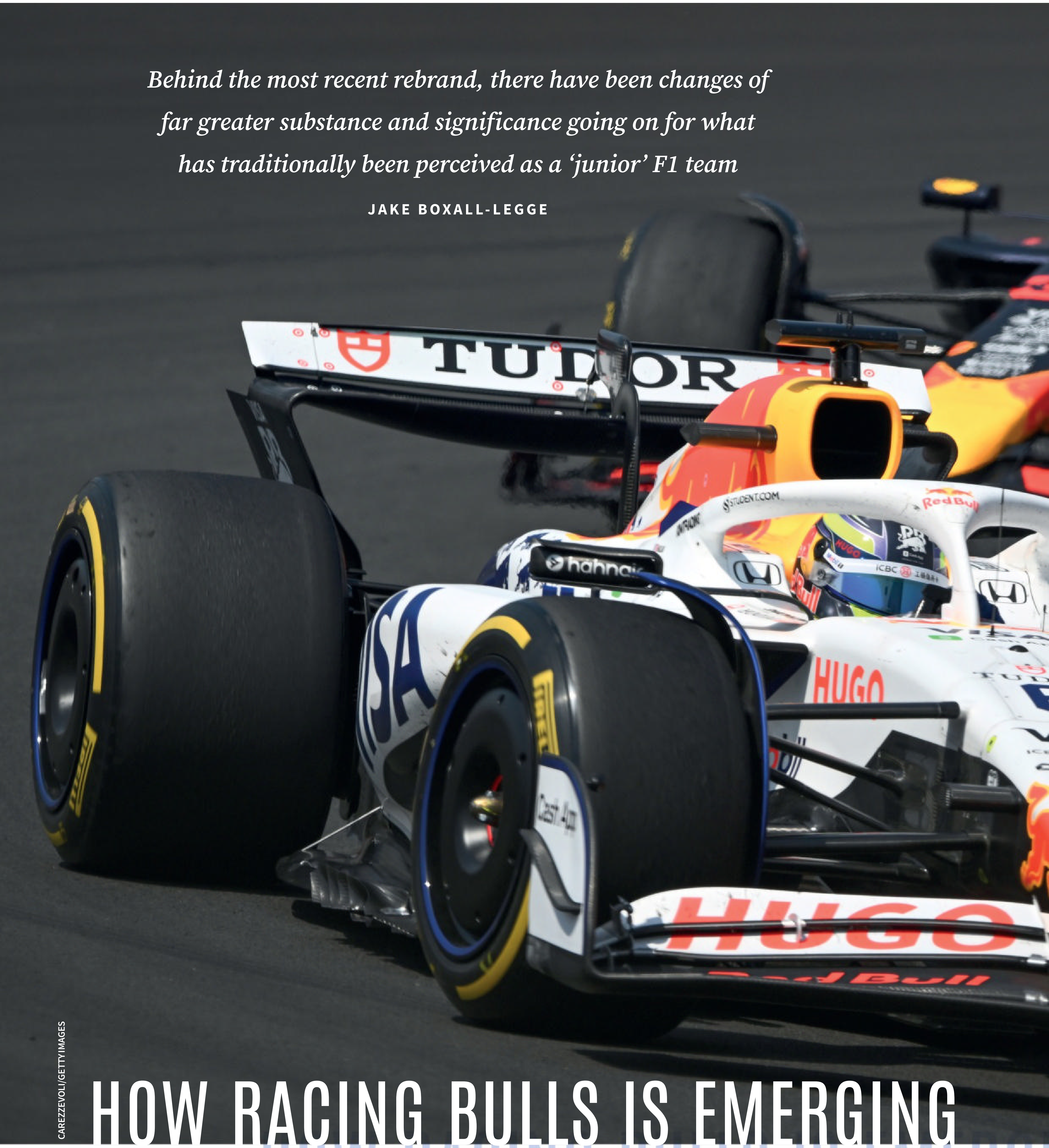
"But it's the way I had to work to get the most out of the car. I had to work at 100% car and probably 0% capacity for other things. When you have a solid, quick car you can work at 99% and then focus 1% of your attention on strategy, tyres, tyre saving – all those different types of things. So, 100% I acknowledge I've got the best car on the grid. Very happy that I say that because it's been a while. I'm proud that we've got to that point as a team and I think we're all proud that we can say that. But, like people have always said, 'The driver can also make a difference'.

"I wouldn't be able to win without the best car. But the car needs to be within like 1%. It needs to be within that little bit that the driver can then make a difference. And that's not a big difference. But like Max could have won in Australia and that's not because the car's shit and he's just amazing – the car's pretty damn good. And he's also very good. It's kind of that you need that little balance right at the end. That 1% the driver can add on to. I think it mainly goes back to the aspect of me and Oscar helping each other, and using each other, it's an advantage. That we definitely get more out of one another than any guy on the grid can do alone."

The early season form of the 2025 F1 campaign suggests that the intra-McLaren title battle will swing from race to race – even leaving aside Verstappen's constant threat and the more fleeting competition from the Mercedes and Ferrari drivers.

But whereas in 2024 the question many a paddock observer posed was, 'When will McLaren and Norris mess up?', now it's, 'Why aren't they?'. The answer, as Norris has made clear, is that they've worked together to produce F1's best car and have learned how to properly win with it.

Throughout F1 history, that adds up to titles. No wonder Norris's reply is absolute when we wish him good luck in his quest for the ultimate prize as it's time to head out into the Shanghai night: "Don't worry, I'm gonna do it..." 🏁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HOW RACING BULLS IS EMERGING

HOW RACING BULLS IS EMERGI

Behind the most recent rebrand, there have been changes of far greater substance and significance going on for what has traditionally been perceived as a 'junior' F1 team

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FROM RED BULL'S SHADOW

FROM RED BULL'S SHADOW

The difference through the Shanghai Turns 12-13 complex was palpable. Yuki Tsunoda's Racing Bulls VCARB 02 purred as the throttle was squeezed on in Q1, submitting to the Japanese driver's inputs to start galloping along the 0.72-mile back straight. Liam Lawson's Red Bull RB21, meanwhile, was considerably less welcoming – and the Kiwi found it particularly recalcitrant when it came to balancing the rear. No wonder he was almost a second slower than Tsunoda in that stage of qualifying.

It was felt that Lawson might be a little bit too undercooked to handle the whims of the RB21. Prior to the Japanese Grand Prix, Red Bull's convocation of chiefs deliberated in Dubai and elected to shuffle the New Zealander around with Tsunoda to bear the line-ups with which many believed it should have begun the year.

Red Bull was at its unsentimental worst, but the easy-going VCARB 02 at least offers Lawson the security of a soft mattress to land upon. Although the Kiwi's defiance in the face of overwhelming pressure painted the picture of someone rallying against the situation, getting kicked to the kerb after a bruising two races with the 'main' team will naturally knock a driver's confidence.

But there are worse places to be, particularly since the car he's now got at his disposal had given Tsunoda a platform to prove his worth in Australia and China. Case in point: Isack Hadjar has already enjoyed his own impressive moments this year with a car that appears user-friendly for a rookie driver to pick up. That's not to say that the diminutive Franco-Algerian hasn't made mistakes, but it has at least offered a shop window for him to establish himself as a nifty qualifier.

Team principal Mekies, with Hadjar, was once a Minardi/Toro Rosso race engineer

CAREZZEVOLI/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Although traditionally pegged as Red Bull's junior team, there's more to the rebranded Racing Bulls squad than has met the eye in 2025. The team has, over the past couple of seasons, quietly undergone something of a concerted growth spurt behind closed doors.

Now under the management of team principal Laurent Mekies and CEO Peter Bayer, the two have formed a compelling duo as F1 team structures now lean towards installing a public-facing double-act at the top of the pyramid – think Andrea Stella and Zak Brown, Christian Horner and Helmut Marko or, in recent times, Oliver Oakes and Flavio Briatore.

The team might have a frustrating penchant for changing its identity, but there's something more tangible behind the latest wardrobe switch.

The genesis of Racing Bulls in its current guise

After nearly 15 years of happily coexisting as Scuderia Toro Rosso, serving as Red Bull's subservient operation, there was an apparently sudden desire to build the Italian squad into its 'sister team'. This coincided with a marked improvement in form over 2019, and in settling on more 'senior' drivers with Pierre Gasly and Daniil Kvyat, both ex-Red Bull charges. This was arguably due to something of a shortfall in its junior programme, and had clung to the drivers it had burned out in the 'lead' team, but the two combined well once Gasly and Alex Albon swapped places to help the team grab sixth in the constructors' standings.

Red Bull wanted to bring its junior team to the next level and, under the technical guidance of Jody Egginton, aimed to trim some of the fat to ensure its bottom line looked a little more impressive. After years of the squad diverging from its 'parent' team in producing its own parts, Egginton wanted to match the Ferrari-Haas 'B-team' model in taking on as many transferrable parts as possible within the bounds of the regulations.

The energy drink brand also had a new clothing line to promote, so the Toro Rosso name was deleted – for four years, the team was known as AlphaTauri. Its celestially themed moniker might have been a more feted name, had Sauber not already switched to the Alfa Romeo brand...

Those first two years as AlphaTauri heralded the team's two best points-scoring seasons, reaching triple figures for the first time in 2020, and then its best-ever tally of 142 points in the following season largely thanks to Gasly, supported by a first-year Tsunoda.

A decline followed, one that coincided with the introduction of the 2022-spec rules. But the alarm bells started to produce a cacophony at the start of 2023, when the AT04 it had produced appeared to be distinctly limited. Erstwhile team principal Franz Tost, known for his calm-but-forthright approach to leadership, aimed both barrels at those responsible for the aero concept of the car. Once he'd shuffled the deck to nip its depreciation in the bud, the Austrian announced that he was hanging up his hat at the end of the year.

Mekies was subsequently peeled away from the Ferrari pitwall to lead the team, one for which he'd worked as a race engineer during its years as Minardi and Toro Rosso. With Tost gone, the team decided to change the way it operated »

ANDRE/GETTY IMAGES

CAREZZEVOLI/GETTY IMAGES / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Gasly and rookie Tsunoda netted the team's best ever points tally of 142 in 2021

Should Lawson have started 2025 season at Racing Bulls, with Tsunoda at Red Bull?

VCARB 02 a more consistent and benign-handling package than 'big brother' RB21

MASON/GETTY IMAGES / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

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MASON/GETTY IMAGES/VCARB/ RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Delayed call to swap to inters cost Tsunoda a decent points haul in season-opening Oz GP

commercially; promoting Red Bull GmbH's AlphaTauri brand was not deemed as much of a nice little earner as selling off the naming rights and opting for a generic constructor name. This was a path pursued by new CEO Bayer, who had joined from the FIA to bolster The Team Formerly Known As Minardi's business case.

RB was a nice convenient suffix to stick on the end of whatever sponsors to which the team had sold its branding, Visa and Cash App purchasing top billing. The company name was registered as Racing Bulls S.p.A. – although Bayer was keen to point out last year that its RB moniker was not an abbreviation for its rather generic company name. Turns out that it was, after all...

Saying goodbye to Bicester

One of the non-negotiable elements of Red Bull's initial deal to buy Minardi was that the team should remain at its Faenza base. The team has stayed true to this but, to remain competitive in the recruitment arena, its Bicester base had grown in importance over the past few years to retain a UK presence.

But it had outgrown those facilities. A handful of personnel were working out of Portakabins and, as Red Bull decided to break ground on a new wind tunnel next to its Milton Keynes base (in addition to its powertrain project), Racing Bulls elected to scour Rightmove to find somewhere closer to benefit from the enhanced internal ecosystem.

There was an opening at a facility conveniently located in 'MK' – not quite on the same premises as Red Bull's campus, but just down the road. So Racing Bulls moved out of its venerable Bicester facilities at the start of this year, with the intention of increasing its appeal by offering potential new hires the chance to work at either Faenza or its new UK base.

"We made a crucial decision – not to localise departments in just one of the two sites, whether it's aero, design or production," Mekies told Motorsport.com's Roberto Chinchero of the team's move. "Instead, we chose a model where each of these departments has staff both in Faenza and Milton Keynes. We have this opportunity, so to maximise it, we expanded it to all departments. This way, we can offer employees the choice to work in Italy or the UK, which is also useful in retaining staff when life choices come into play."

For now, the team is still at the behest of Red Bull's ageing wind tunnel in Bedford, but the new facilities are very much in progress and touted for a 2026 grand opening. There have been further technical changes afoot, with Egginton 'moved upstairs' into a role with Red Bull Advanced Technologies. Ex-McLaren man Tim Goss will assimilate some of the Midlander's duties into his existing chief technical officer role.

VCARBs easy to digest

It's fair to suggest that Racing Bulls is in contention for fifth in this year's constructors' championship. It has competition from a renewed Williams for that honour, perhaps even Aston Martin on a good day, but on pure pace the alabaster machines have filled the void between F1's 'Big Four' and the midfield runners and riders.

Crucially, that pace appears to be repeatable, too; the VCARB 02 seems to be defined by excellent compliance and a relatively neutral handling range, just bordering on a smidgen of understeer. Despite its common parts with Red Bull, Racing Bulls' technical team has managed to entice them to work in a completely different manner. The rear is predictable and »

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	EVENT	CIRCUIT	DATE	GRIDS
🇫🇷	GRAND PRIX DE FRANCE HISTORIQUE	PAUL RICARD, FR	25 – 27 APR	F1 MGC
🇩🇪	THE JIM CLARK REVIVAL	HOCKENHEIM, DE	9 – 11 MAY	F1 MEL GD & TC
🇬🇧	MASTERS HISTORIC FESTIVAL	BRANDS HATCH, GB	31 MAY – 1 JUN	F1 SC GTT GD TC F1'90
🇳🇱	HISTORIC GRAND PRIX	ZANDVOORT, NL	20 – 22 JUN	F1 SC MEL GTT GD & TC
🇩🇪	OLDTIMER GRAND PRIX	NÜRBURGRING, DE	1 – 3 AUG	F1 MGC
🇬🇧	SILVERSTONE FESTIVAL	SILVERSTONE, GB	22 – 24 AUG	F1 SC MGC MEL GTT GD TC
🇦🇪	MASTERS HISTORIC WEEKEND	DUBAI, AE	24 – 26 OCT	F1 SC MGC MEL & GTT GD & TC F1'90

	EVENT	CIRCUIT	DATE	GRIDS
🇦🇪	GULF HISTORIC (NON-POINTS SCORING ROUND)	ABU DHABI, AE	31 OCT – 2 NOV	F1 SC MGC MEL & GTT GD & TC F1'90

Dates and venues correct at time of going to press, however, Masters reserves the right to make changes to this calendar.

EVENT SERIES KEY

F1	Masters Racing Legends for 66/85 F1 Cars
SC	Masters Sports Car Legends
MGC	Masters Group C
MEL	Masters Endurance Legends
GTT	Masters GT Trophy
GD	Masters Gentlemen Drivers
TC	Masters Pre-66 Touring Cars
F1'90	Masters Demo Legends for 90s F1 Cars

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CAREZZEVOLI/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Adherence to pre-race plan and not adapting strategy in China was unhelpful

settled, and the front end lets itself be led by the drivers' inputs rather than – as with the Red Bull – amping up the sensitivity at the wheel.

In longer corners, these traits allow the drivers to cling on and balance the rear on the throttle. In shorter turns, the car gives the drivers latitude to play with their corner entries – perhaps at the expense of needing to work the wheel a little more to get the turn-in at the apex.

At the start of the year, Mekies stated that the team "wanted to have a car that has a bit more consistency compared to last year. We had very good moments but, after we had more difficult races, in terms of overall target we have tried to understand what made our car not so consistent last year and address some of that."

Last year's pull-rod switch, bringing it in line with the suspension components used by Red Bull, required time to scope out, although the team was nonetheless in the hunt for sixth in the constructors' championship. With a season's worth of experience, it seems that the team has got its head around the associated changes in kinematics and put together a benign-handling car.

"Is it only an advantage to receive pre-made gearboxes and suspension?" Mekies explained. "Not entirely. We can see that in other customer teams, which have sometimes opted to buy parts but later abandoned the approach. There are pros and cons.

"The advantages are clear – we don't need to add more personnel to our 650-strong workforce, nor do we need to invest in R&D for gearboxes and suspensions. Another benefit is receiving parts from a top team, knowing they are made to the highest standards.

"The downside is that you don't fully grasp the reasoning behind certain design choices, which can be a challenge when we are fighting for every tenth of a second."

Iffy strategy calls reduce early-season pay-off

A healthy haul of points went begging in both Australia and China. The delayed call to switch to intermediate tyres cost Tsunoda – running in fifth place before the mid-race downpour turned the GP on its head – a hefty pay-day, culminating in his off-track excursion at Turn 12 as the final sector of the Albert Park circuit was worst affected by the precipitation.

China might have been a more egregious scenario. Both Tsunoda and Hadjar were running in the top 10 before the strategists decided to stick to the pre-race prediction of a two-stopper, rather than respond to the lower-than-expected wear of the hard tyre and eke out the stint. The two had pitted no earlier than the other points-scoring runners, but perhaps the team had banked on overtaking being easier than it proved to be in the dying stages at Shanghai.

Racing Bulls' proclivity to going all-in with its strategies has been detrimental so far. At least it knows that, with Hadjar showing good early pace this year, it can potentially split strategy calls in 50-50 situations. In races where strategies are arguably more linear, the team should be able to capitalise.

The off-track evolution that Racing Bulls has undergone over the past two years now appears to be bearing fruit, and it's up to Goss and co to keep the forward momentum as the championship moves into its next ruleset in 2026. In the short term, there's the small matter of a fifth-place finish in the constructors' championship available. Sure, Racing Bulls has the car and now the infrastructure to achieve an all-time high WCC finish, but the tightness of the midfield battle will ensure it has a steep hill to climb to get there.

HONE

SAUBER F1 DRIVER

GABRIEL BORTOLETO

"I CALLED HIM RIGHT AFTER I SIGNED MY F1 CONTRACT, AND ASKED, 'WHY DID YOU DO IT?'"

OLEG KARPOV

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

He moved to Europe less than 10 years ago to chase his dream of becoming a Formula 1 driver – and achieved it in style. Gabriel Bortoleto is of a special pedigree, with his junior career including back-to-back titles in F3 and F2 – something only Charles Leclerc, George Russell and Oscar Piastri can boast. He's now the first Brazilian with a regular spot on the F1 grid since Felipe Massa left the pinnacle of the sport in 2017. We sat down with one of F1's rookies of 2025 to talk about his path – and about a driver he names as his idol: Ayrton Senna.

Gabriel, what was it like to move from Brazil to a different continent when you were 12?
Well, obviously it was a risk. But when you're 12 and you have a dream, you don't think about it, no? For me, if I'm honest, it was easy. I wanted to race go-karts in the best championships – and European karting was the best place to do that. So, what would you prefer? To go to school every day in Brazil or go racing in Europe? It's quite different! Obviously, jokes aside, being away from family is never easy, but I only suffered during the first year. I got used to the new life very quickly.

Did you move together with your coach, Francesco di Mauro?
Yes, he was my driver coach, exactly. And he was like family. He's like a second father to me, even now. He was always great to me. At the beginning, it was just me and him – two of us living in the same house, cooking together, doing the washing, learning a lot of new things. Because in Brazil, this was all taken care of for me, and for him, too, by his wife – and here we had to manage everything on our own.

It was an amazing period in my life, one where I also became much more responsible and mature. Later, his family moved as well. But yeah, I think that time was very important for me.

For him, it must have been a difficult decision too, to move away from his family to help you in Europe.
I called him right after I signed my F1 contract – before it was announced. I wanted to talk to him, obviously. We had a very deep conversation, because a lot of things went through my mind at that moment when I achieved the dream. I was finally where I wanted to be – and that was his dream as well.

I asked him during that call, like, "Why did you do it?" Because to do something like this, you have to believe in it. I think he just loved me, and I loved him so much. I was like his kid as well – and he trusted I could achieve something big.

Honestly, every time I think about it, I see how crazy that move was for him – even more than for me, probably. And I'm very grateful to him.

His son, Gaetano, is a racing driver, right?
He's a great driver. He raced in British Formula 3 [when it was still BRDC F4] back in the day, and he was very, very good. But just because of financial reasons, he couldn't keep going in Europe, so he returned to Brazil and became a professional driver.

He's one of the top guys there – and actually, I initially wanted him to be my coach because he was so good. I asked my father to talk to him, to see if he could work with me. I think I was around eight at the time. So, one day I got to the track expecting Gaetano would come to teach me but, instead, it was Francesco. And he said, "Don't worry, I was the one teaching him." And it was true. That's how we started working together – and I think it was the best thing that could have happened to me.

How did European karting treat you?
I think we were lucky to find a good team. Because there's so much politics in karting. It can be a bit dirty too. You can get a better engine here and there, there's a lot of money involved... But my father would never allow us to play dirty. I was lucky I found CRG, one of the top manufacturers. I got very close to [Giancarlo] Tinini, the owner and founder, and he embraced me like a little project for his brand. So I did my whole career with them – from 12 to 16 more or less. He trusted me and gave me the best material available. Even if it wasn't the absolute best overall, it was the best we could get, and we achieved great things.

I'd say my karting career was successful. I wasn't world champion, but I was in the top three in the European Championship, I was vice-champion in WSK. We had good results.

Then, Gabriel, to be frank, you didn't look like a superstar when you moved to single-seaters. But you made a big step up once you got to F3. Why is that?
If I'm honest, I don't want to go too much into polemics here, but let me just say this: F3 and F2 are a lot more professional than the lower categories. Formula 4 and Formula Regional European are good championships, but I don't think they have the same control over engines and cars – and sometimes there's just a big difference between them.

I'm not saying people want to give advantages to certain drivers, it's just that the series can't manage it that tightly. And although I don't like the word, I'd say I wasn't so lucky on that side – with »

"SO, WHAT WOULD YOU PREFER? TO GO TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY IN BRAZIL OR GO RACING IN EUROPE?"

GSI/ICON SPORT

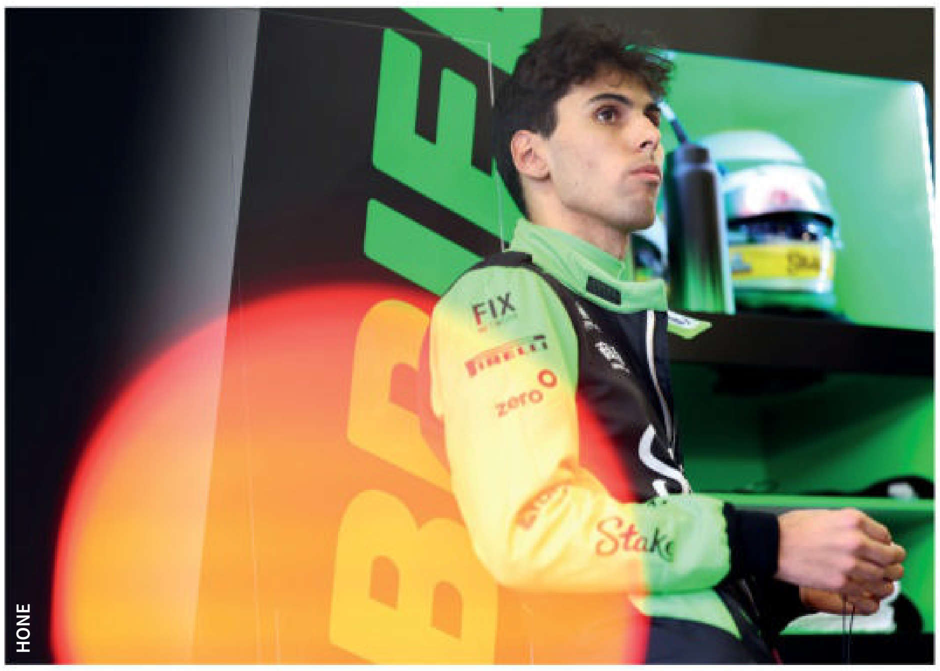
Below: Trident "took a risk" on Bortoleto in F3 –and he duly delivered on potential the team had seen in him

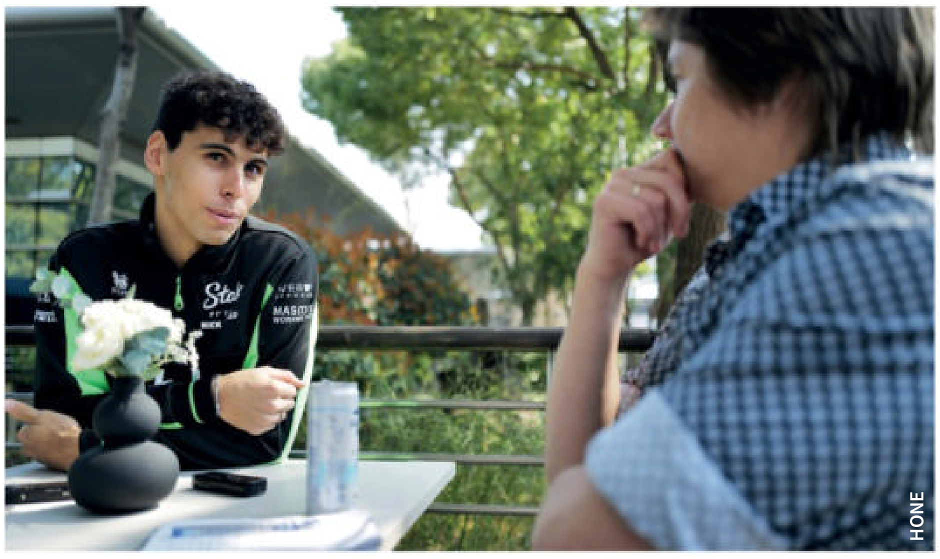
CAREZZEVOLI - FORMULA 1/FORMULA MOTORSPORT LIMITED

Ahead of his move to F2, Bortoleto sized up Invicta as a team he'd gel with – and another title followed

Desire to build something as part of a long-term project in F1 is huge motivation, but pressure to perform comes from within

Above: Senna's legend and legacy are woven into the fabric of Brazilian society, so it's only natural for Bortoleto to be a fan





“I WANT TO PROVE MYSELF – TO MYSELF. THAT’S HOW I’VE ALWAYS BEEN. EVEN WITH A LONG-TERM DEAL”

getting good engines or the best bits in F4 and FRECA. But every time I changed teams mid-season, I improved straight away, getting podiums and wins.

How much did it help to sign with A14 Management?
Very much. I wanted to sign with Trident in F3, but my results weren’t that great. I was sixth in FRECA – and with that, there’s no guarantee you get a good F3 seat. Without them, I would never have got it. But they had good contacts, and it’s always people who decide. Giacomo [Ricci, team manager] trusted them. He took a risk.

I remember we had dinner and talked about statistics. He said he could see in the numbers what kind of difference the engines made in FRECA – he knew those things, and he was a racing driver himself. He saw I finished most races and brought the car home. When I had a car for fourth, I finished fourth. If the car was only good for sixth, I was sixth. And he told me, “If you get in our car in F3 and perform like you did before, then you can fight for the title.” And that’s exactly what happened. He was right.

Even before our first test, we knew we had something. Then we won the first race in Bahrain, then in Melbourne. I remember, I had a second-year guy in my DRS the whole race, and I kept it clean, no mistakes – brought it home. That was the moment I thought, “I think I’m ready to win this championship.”

The move to Invicta Racing in F2 was crucial too...
I have a driver coach, Roberto Streit, who I still work with. He’s a very good driver, was one of the stars in Brazil and even tested F1. And together we’re very data-driven. We know who I am as a driver, what kind of car I like – and early on, we saw that Invicta, which was Virtuosi at the time, had a car I could like. They were always strong; maybe didn’t win the title, but always second or third.

When we watched their onboards, we could see the car suited my style. And the feeling was mutual. When I started strong in F3, we already had early talks. In the end, it all came together – and when I moved to F2, I knew their set-up philosophy would suit me. They adapted things to me as well, and it worked very well.

You’re now in F1, part of a long-term project with Audi. Does that reduce the pressure in your first year? Unlike some of your fellow rookies, you don’t have to perform here and now. Everyone understands you can learn and improve.
Well, it’s obviously better than having a one-year contract, right? But it doesn’t take away the fact I want to prove myself – to myself. That’s how I’ve always been. Even with a long-term deal, I don’t feel more comfortable or anything like that. If I don’t perform, the contract doesn’t matter. We know where we are as a team now and where we want to be in a few years. That makes me happy. More than the contract itself, it’s the project. We want to be title contenders. We want to win races and achieve big things. That motivates me.

You were born in 2004 – a full decade after 1994. But you talk about Ayrton Senna with real admiration. How come, if you never saw him race live?
I think if you ask any driver on the grid, almost everyone would say Senna was the best of all time. Of course, Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton won more titles, and I don’t want to take anything away from them – but for me, growing up as a Brazilian, I became an admirer of Senna not just because of what he did on track, but who he was and what he did for Brazil, and still does.

My father used to tell me how, despite the political and economic situation in the country – with so much poverty – Senna was the one everyone woke up for. People from all backgrounds, rich or poor, would watch him race and hear him speak. The way he represented Brazil was something huge. So, when you grow up hearing those stories, seeing him on TV, reading about him, you become a fan. His legacy never died. The Ayrton Senna Institute still helps so many kids in Brazil today.

Did you really watch the Netflix series about him before the F2 finale in Abu Dhabi?
Yes, I watched it every night before the race weekend. Started a few days before – didn’t finish it until Sunday. On Saturday night, I saw the episode where Senna fights Martin Brundle for the F3 title. It’s the last race of the season – he brings his engine to Italy, then goes back to the UK for the finale. That was inspiring. Of course, it’s a series – there’s a bit of fiction – but it was a nice way to prepare for the title fight. It gave me an extra boost.

Your helmet is inspired by Senna’s design. Doesn’t that add pressure?
No, it doesn’t. Last year was a proper tribute – a 30-year special for Senna. But it’s also the colour of my country – our flag – and I’m proud to represent it. People will always bring up Senna – so yes, it’s tough to be compared to him, because no one will ever be what he was. We know where we are now, I’m not winning races yet. But fans understand. That’s a big step forward compared to the time of Massa and Rubens [Barrichello]. Back then it was more like: either you win, or you’re not good enough. But now, after so many years without a Brazilian in F1, we’re back. I think the fans understand our situation, our ambitions – and they’ve been patient, supportive and very kind to me.

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COLOMBO/GETTY IMAGES

Much more than F1's half-point heroine...

It's 50 years since Lella Lombardi became the first – and so far only – woman to take a points-scoring finish in a grand prix, but she should be remembered for more

JON SALTINSTALL

Since the inauguration of the Formula 1 World Championship for Drivers in 1950, nearly 900 drivers have attempted to qualify for the starting grid. Only five of these have been women, just two of whom have managed it. With 17 entries and 12 starts, by far the most successful of these women is Lella Lombardi.

Many a pub quizzer will tell you that she is also the only woman to have finished an F1 championship grand prix in a points-scoring position, but it's worth noting that she did so when points were awarded for only the top six positions, rather than the top 10. Since Lombardi's sixth place came in a race that was stopped early, she received just half a point. Nonetheless, the Italian achieved something that two thirds of the men who started a race failed to, and did so in only her second GP. However, this remarkable accomplishment overshadows the rest of her 22-year career. There was an awful lot more to Lombardi than simply being the woman who scored half a point in the 1975 Spanish Grand Prix. »

5
IMEC
NOVOLA

CLAUDIO ZANCAI

1970 Italian F850 title was a marker of Lombardi's commitment and speed

Born in 1941 in the tiny village of Frugarolo, close to Alessandria, Lombardi was the youngest of three children. Her father was a butcher and Lella became the first person in her family to hold a driving licence, learning at the wheel of the delivery van. She gained a taste for competition by racing her Lambretta against the village boys – in whom she had no other interest – which resulted in a visit from the local priest, asking her to tame her wild ways. The request fell on deaf ears...

Blagging her way into the co-driver's seat in local rallies convinced her that she wanted to race professionally. She scrimped and saved her way into the sport, starting with the nascent Formula 875 Monza in 1965. Thanks to financial support from her brother, her life partner Fiorenza and a hire-purchase deal, Lombardi acquired a Fiat-based CRM single-seater and quickly established herself as a frontrunner, claiming a heat win in only her third race. She prepared the car herself and towed it to the tracks with her road car, finishing ninth in the series in 1965 and eighth the following year.

In one of her rare interviews, she told how she hated the condescending smiles from some male rivals, which conveyed either contempt or the patronising suggestion, 'I'll help you because you're just a woman who won't be able to do this alone.' Her response was furious; one rival commented: "She keeps her hair very short and adopts the worst manners of any in the paddock. But she tries harder than anyone."

Following an unsuccessful move into the national F3 series, too soon for her limited experience, Lombardi took a step back into F850 in 1968. Here she really showed her mettle and, armed with a reliable Biraghi chassis, won the Italian championship in 1970 against rivals who would later be frontrunners in F2, taking four outright victories along the way. She had competed on an equal footing with her male rivals and beaten them in a straight fight. It was the vindication of her refusal to acknowledge that her gender was of any relevance to her abilities; a racing driver was just a racing driver.

Lombardi finished second in the F850 championship in 1971 and ran a concurrent campaign in Formula Ford before returning to F3 for 1972. A long-in-the-tooth Lotus 69 did her no favours, but she made a better showing the following year in a new Brabham BT41.

A strong outing at the Monaco GP support event brought her to the attention of Brands Hatch promoter John Webb. When he saw her add the 1973 Italian Ford Mexico Challenge crown to her tally, he recognised the publicity value of having a competitive female driver in one of his championships. After an impressive track test by Lombardi, Webb found her a seat with Jackie Epstein's ShellSport team in the 1974 European F5000 Series. Lella quickly took to the five-litre, 500bhp big bangers that team manager Jeff Hazell recalls "were like a sock with lead in it. Not an easy car to drive."

She also faced stiff competition from hardened racers who gave little quarter. Fifth in the championship was a fair reward for her steady progress. Further competitive F5000 appearances in the USA and – particularly – Australia, where she was robbed of two almost certain victories by a crew member's mistake in under-fuelling her car and a mechanical failure, made her more famous down under than she was in her homeland.

Meanwhile she had made an abortive attempt to qualify a year-old Brabham BT42 for the British GP at Brands Hatch. Although she missed the cut by a hair's breadth, thanks to a broken half shaft, she had laid down a marker. Former world champion Graham Hill, who had competed against Maria Teresa de Filippis (the only other woman ever to have contested an F1 championship race), said bluntly: "De Filippis had a go, but you couldn't compare her to this woman Lombardi. Lombardi is something else."

Few doubted that Lella would have been an F5000 championship contender in 1975, but she had other ambitions. With the support of her new benefactor Count Gughi Zanon, who had backed her Jolly Club-run Lola T292 in a few Interserie and Italian Championship sportscar races, she became the first woman to hold an F1 works contract. The cash-strapped March team eagerly accepted Zanon's £50,000 contribution, though March's Robin Herd recalled: "Lella wasn't there to make up the numbers. We knew what she'd done before and, clearly, she was very capable."

His faith was repaid when she qualified for her first race with the team, albeit in a year-old car that failed to go the distance. When challenged by a local reporter that she was only there because of her novelty value, she responded: "Whilst being a woman may have made it easier for me to find sponsorship, if I hadn't demonstrated that I merited their support, rest assured they would have soon withdrawn it. The incentive is to show that I can be equal and, sometimes, superior to my colleagues. I hope that people now understand that I am a racer who is a woman, rather than a woman who races. That's a distinction that I care about very much."

Most drivers felt that the Spanish GP should not have been run, given Montjuich Park's improperly secured crash barriers. Railroaded into the contest like her rivals, Lombardi qualified last after gear selection problems in practice, but she kept her head down and drove a circumspect race. The threatened catastrophe eventually happened when leader Rolf Stommelen's Hill leapt over the barriers after losing its rear wing as it crested the rise past the pits, killing four spectators and a fire marshal. The race was stopped, at which point Lombardi »

McKLEIN

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DUNLOP
Shell SPORT LUXEMBOURG
ALLIED POLYMER GROUP
208
GOODYEAR

> *"I am a racer who is a woman, rather than a woman who races"*

Above: 1973 Monaco F3 outing turned heads, as did '74 British GP qualifying bid

Below: controversial 1975 Spanish GP a defining moment for Lombardi

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

Castillo d
Museo M
Parque
LELLA LOMBARDI
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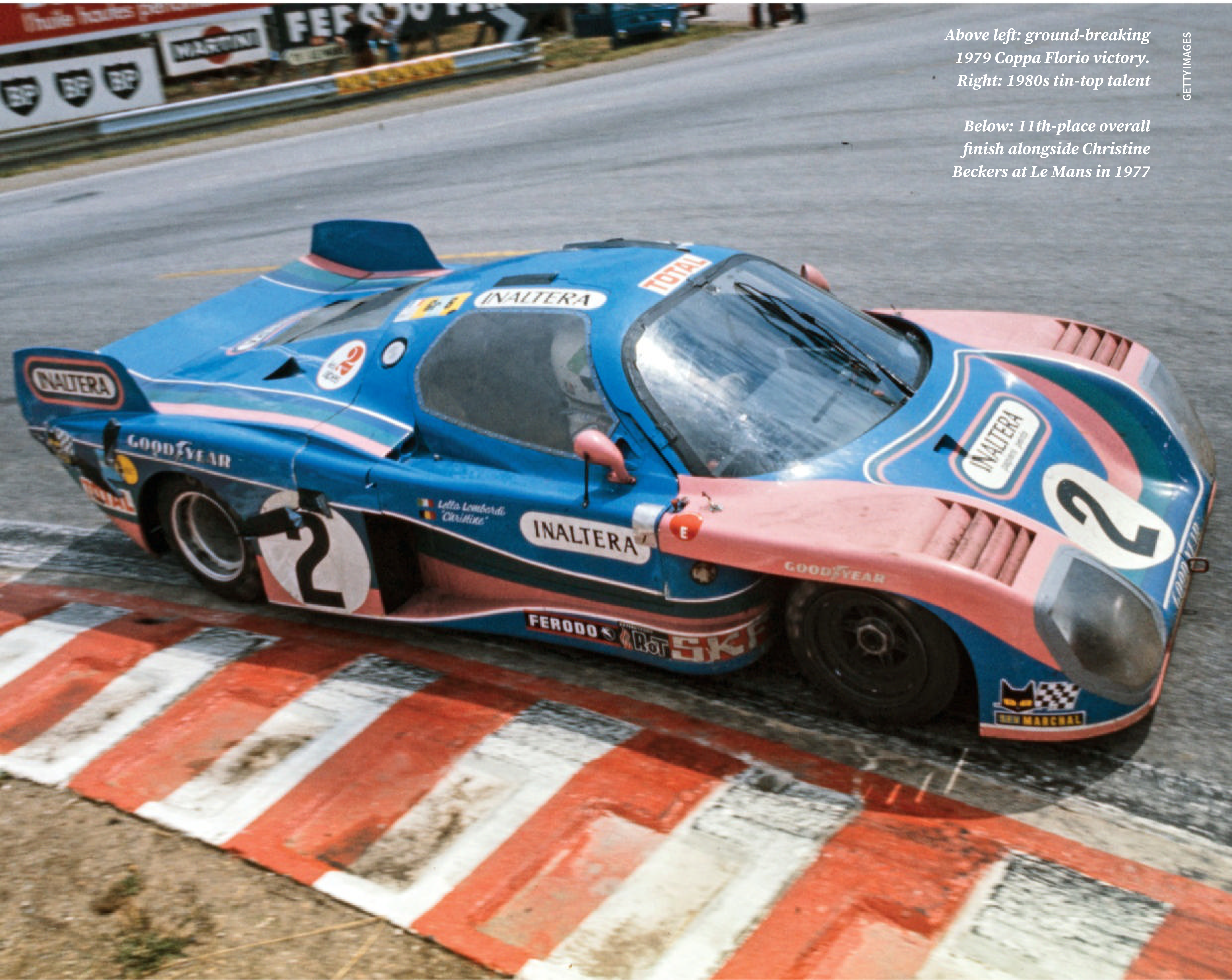
GOODYEAR

McKLEIN

“Too many women feel that motor racing is a masculine affair; well, I don’t agree”



Above left: ground-breaking 1979 Coppa Florio victory. Right: 1980s tin-top talent

Below: 11th-place overall finish alongside Christine Beckers at Le Mans in 1977

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Beta
GOODYEAR
VITTORIO
Beta 9
agv
CHAMPION
LELLA

COLOMBO/GETTY IMAGES

Lombardi was shown the door by March after the opening race of 1976 in Brazil

had risen to sixth position, with only eight cars still circulating. She was two laps behind Jochen Mass's McLaren, taking what would be his only GP victory, but she had stayed on the road when many others hadn't. As less than two-thirds of the distance had been completed, half points were awarded; the first time this regulation had been invoked. Lombardi received just half a point for her valiant efforts, but it was the first time in F1's history that a female driver had finished in the points.

"I don't think it dawned on me that I was the very first woman to collect championship points," she later told the *New York Times*. "Things like that don't bother me.

"I'm just as competitive as any man. Too many women feel that motor racing is a masculine affair; well, I don't agree. It's simply a competitive sport. There's a lot of glamour around being the first girl to do well in F1, but it's overrated. I love racing and that's all I want to do. I don't think there's a difference between male and female – the thing I like is the feeling when you pass the chequered flag first. That's something I don't have any problems sharing with my male colleagues."

The Spanish result aside, her F1 season was frustrating. Her car was consistently less competitive than those of her team-mates, thanks to her receiving tired engines, older components and often less-effective tyres. A well-documented story recounts her repeated complaints about her car's mysterious handling, which was attributed to the consequences of an early-season crash that only came to light when her successor at March, Ronnie Peterson, reported the same issue when he was given Lella's former chassis to drive in 1976. When the tub was stripped down at the factory, a cracked internal bulkhead was found to be the culprit, by which time the damage to Lombardi's F1 season – and her reputation – had been done. She was unceremoniously dropped by March in favour of the returning Peterson after one race in 1976, and a few outings with John MacDonald's year-old RAM Brabhams brought nothing but disappointment. Her F1 adventure was over.

However, in parallel she had competed rather more successfully in sportscars, where she had been paired with Marie-Claude 'Beaumont' in the works Alpine-Renault squad in 1975. The duo claimed class honours at Monza and were candidates for outright victory at Le Mans until a miscalculation of the car's fuel consumption by the engineers left Beaumont stranded out on the track. The following year Lombardi shared a Lancia Stratos with Christine Dacremont to second in the GTP class, and her 11th place overall with Christine Beckers in 1977 was the best post-war result by an all-female crew at the French classic. She later raced privateer Group 4 and 5 Porsches before joining the works Osella squad at the end of 1978 to become the mainstay of their two-litre campaign.

It was in an Osella, in 1979, that she made history again. Although the Coppa Florio, now held at Enna-Pergusa, was a shadow of its past glories, it still formed a round of the World Championship for Makes. Lombardi started from the front row and, supported by local driver Enrico Grimaldi, she set fastest lap en route to a dominant victory, becoming the first woman to win an FIA-sanctioned championship event. She followed it up with further WCM wins at Vallelunga later in the year and at Mugello in 1981.

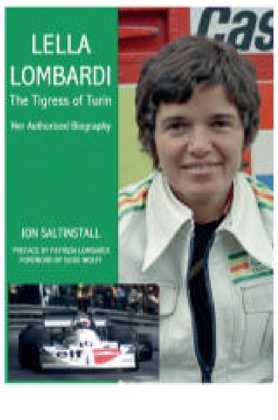
Alongside her sportscar activities, Lombardi had emerged as a highly effective touring car driver. After a year wrestling with a Luigi-entered Chevrolet Camaro alongside Anna Cambiaghi, she spearheaded Alfa Romeo's European Touring Car Championship campaign driving the Jolly Club's Alfetta GTV6s. She claimed 13 class wins and jointly won the 1985 Division 2 Championship, sharing with Rinaldo Drovandi. Now regarded as one of the most experienced hands in the series, her mechanical sympathy and set-up skills were acknowledged as being from the top drawer.

Quiet and self-effacing, Lombardi did not seek the spotlight and kept her personal life private, largely to protect her partner, Fiorenza. She gave few interviews, and didn't dress in a then-traditionally feminine way that might bring her more attention. For Lella, racing was the only thing that mattered and everything else was incidental.

Although her story is one of struggles and setbacks, where she was often let down by limited funds and unreliable cars, it is also one of remarkable achievements and successes with the equipment and opportunities available to her. Lombardi was a quiet force of nature, with an all-consuming determination to follow her passion above all else. Seventeen career pole positions and 20 fastest laps confirm she was no slouch when it came to outright speed, either.

In 1988, she formed her own team, Lella Lombardi Autosport, to create opportunities for new drivers. Ill-health forced her to retire from racing early that season; only a handful of close friends knew that she had been fighting breast cancer since 1985. She had believed the pain she was suffering to be due to a sailing injury, which proved not to be the case.

On 3 March 1992, three weeks before her 51st birthday, Lombardi died peacefully in Milan's San Camillo Clinic. Fifty years on from her groundbreaking F1 points finish, no woman has yet matched her achievement.



Jon Saltinstall's forthcoming book,* Lella Lombardi: The Tigress of Turin, Her Authorised Biography, *will be out soon, courtesy of BHP Publishing.

NOW
THAT
WAS
A
CAR

BENETTON B195

BENETTON SPORTSYSTEM
Lpr
RTL
TECHNOGYM
RENAULT
elf
1
MILD SEVEN
MAGNETI MARELLI
MODEL CARS Minichamps
MILD SEVEN

It might not have been quite the faster car of 1995 – but it had Michael Schumacher at the wheel and a field of rivals seemingly determined to make life difficult for themselves...

STUART CODLING

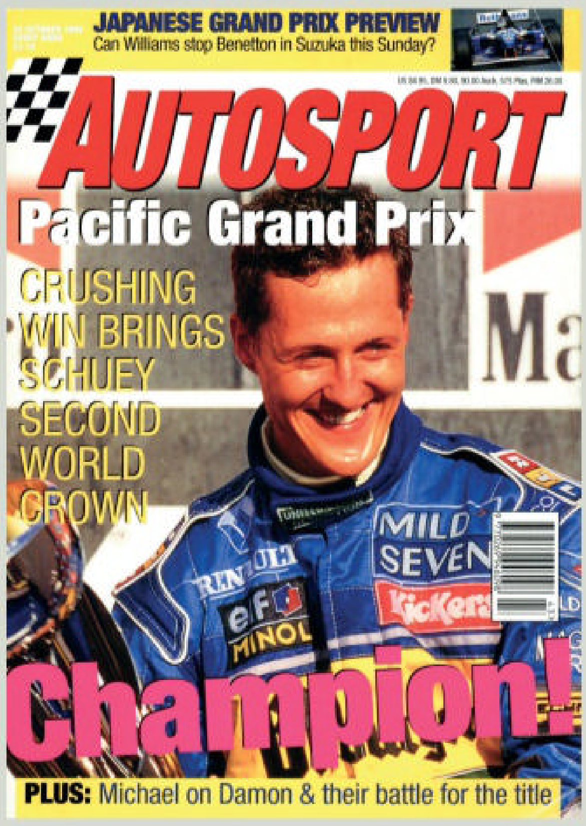
JAMES MANN

Rarely does a championship-winning Formula 1 team begin a new season with a major point to prove, but the middle years of the 1990s were a highly unusual time. The 1994 season was one that all involved would have preferred to forget, what with that hateful weekend at Imola and the long tail of its consequences.

And for the team that had collected the drivers' championship but not the constructors' title, victory came with the aftertaste of ashes. Allegations of cheating hung over Benetton like a poisonous miasma, as did the way Michael Schumacher secured the trophy: by barging Damon Hill off the track in an obvious professional foul.

Benetton had been viewed as something of a rogue outsider for years – a perception that intensified when Flavio Briatore, the man responsible for signing off the sometimes scandalous ad campaigns for which the parent company had become known, was installed as commercial director, then rapidly elevated to running the show. Relatively little-known to the public at first, Briatore entered mainstream consciousness and acquired pantomime villain status through his part in engineering Michael Schumacher's transfer from Jordan to Benetton in 1991.

1994 should have been a breakthrough year for a team »



JAPANESE GRAND PRIX PREVIEW
Can Williams stop Benetton in Suzuka this Sunday?
AUTOSPORT
Pacific Grand Prix
CRUSHING WIN BRINGS SCHUEY SECOND WORLD CROWN
Champion!
PLUS: Michael on Damon & their battle for the title

that McLaren boss Ron Dennis had once said would never win a championship. The B194 was fast, albeit more so in the hands of Schumacher than Jos Verstappen, a late call-up to replace the injured JJ Lehto. But in a season where the banning of electronic systems such as traction control and active suspension had made the cars trickier to drive – particularly the ones with peaky aero originally optimised around active ride – there were well-founded suspicions that the car was illegal. It's said that Ayrton Senna, watching trackside after retiring from the Pacific Grand Prix, became convinced he could hear the traction control kicking in; FIA investigators later found the TC software still on Benetton's laptops, supposedly deactivated but still accessible via a hidden menu. But in the absence of evidence that the system had been used, the FIA had to let the matter drop – according to the governing body's president, Max Mosley.

Subsequent episodes, such as a pitstop fire at Hockenheim which led to the discovery that a filter had been removed from the fuel rig to speed up the flow, and a ban for Schumacher for excessive underfloor plank wear at Spa, played to the narrative of a team consciously straying beyond the boundaries of what was acceptable. The presence of Tom Walkinshaw – known for his creative approach to regulatory compliance – as engineering director did nothing to dispel this. In short, probably only twice more in the interim – 2008 and 2021 – has the destination of a world championship proved so divisive.

Those working for Benetton at the time continue to insist that no wrongdoing occurred, and there is compelling evidence to suggest that Benetton wasn't the only team to remove the filter – and that its 'mesh' was too big to have stopped the particle that jammed the nozzle. Its defence when summoned before the World Motor Sport Council was to be that the FIA's homologated equipment wasn't fit for purpose, and to that end it engaged George Carman QC, the silk who famously secured the acquittal of politician Jeremy Thorpe on charges of attempted murder.

Mysteriously, the matter was brushed under the carpet at the WMSC: Benetton pivoted to plead guilty but was cleared, and the infraction blamed on 'a junior employee' – Simon Morley, the refuelling rig handler. In 2008 a newspaper report co-authored by a journalist known to be a mouthpiece for F1 'ringmaster' Bernie Ecclestone claimed that a deal had been engineered behind the scenes to dissuade Mosley from booting Benetton out of the world championship (which would have been costly for F1 in Schumacher's native Germany, a growing market), and avoid subjecting the fuel rigs to Carman's potentially excoriating scrutiny.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Benetton launched into 1995 with a point to prove and a new car with which to make that point. It had a different mode of propulsion, too, since Briatore had identified the relatively underpowered Ford V8 as the weak link of the 1994 package and bought another team – Ligier – in order to transfer its Renault engine supply to Benetton. By persuading Walkinshaw to go in with him on the deal and take over the running of Ligier, Briatore also shook off some (if not all) of the Mosley heat.

Led by Ross Brawn, whom Walkinshaw had imported from his Jaguar sportscar project in 1991, Benetton's engineering department shrugged off the Scot's departure and knuckled down to the business of sticking it to their critics. While the B195 was an evolution of the B194 concept, it was an all-new car – it had to be, because a new crash-testing regime had come in along with a raft of other performance-limiting measures in the wake of that tragic Imola weekend.

Some, such as the underfloor plank, shorter diffuser, trimmed front-wing endplates, and slots at the rear of the airbox, had been brought in over the course of 1994 and it had simply been a case of adapting the existing car. Others, such as larger cockpit openings, the reduction in engine displacement from 3.5 to three litres, a slashing of diffuser width, and raising the height of the floor on each side of the plank, were imposed for the following season but not ratified until September 1994. Controversially, not only was refuelling retained, but the 200-litre minimum tank size was dropped.

As usual with sweeping regulatory changes – especially ones confirmed so late – some teams adapted better than others, and the measures aimed at cutting performance had unforeseen consequences. When originally introduced, the underfloor plank had only a small effect on lap times. The 1995 regulations extended the plank so it ran from the front wheel centreline to the rear wheel centreline, rather than terminating at the leading edge of the rear wheels. More significant was the 50mm 'step' on each side, beneath the sidepods, which raised the centre of gravity (because the radiators and exhausts, etc, were now higher) and made it more difficult to generate negative pressure below the car.

Twenty-five or so miles south of Benetton's Enstone factory, at the Williams facility in Grove, Adrian Newey and technical director Patrick Head were arguing over whether a longitudinal rather than transverse gearbox would be the best way to exploit a loophole Newey had identified in the new diffuser rules. Like other tech bosses up and down the paddock, Head thought developing an all-new transmission in the time available would cause reliability problems. He won that argument, but suggested redesigning the existing transverse unit with stepped gears, freeing up space for the diffuser profile Newey envisaged. Even so, it wouldn't be ready until mid-season.

Benetton's principal challenge with the B195 was adapting to the different balance conferred by the Renault V10: size, shape, length and centre of gravity all differed from the Cosworth that preceded it. The power delivery was peakier too, but would that be a problem for Schumacher? Less so than deciding on his future for, even as the B195 was unveiled to the public in February 1995, speculation was mounting that he wanted out at the end of his contract, and suitors were lining up to offer rich rewards in exchange for the clean start he wanted to make.

The identity of Schumacher's team-mate had also been a matter of debate, since several drivers had proved unequal to the task of being a competitive number two. Briatore had dropped Jos Verstappen in favour of Johnny Herbert (resulting, it seems, in a beef that lasts until the present day) two races from the end of the 1994 season to bolster Benetton's bid for the constructors' championship. Now Herbert was given a full season to do the job – a development few would have expected in the middle of 1989, when he was struggling with the effects of his ankle injuries and Briatore fired him from the same team. »

JAMES MANN

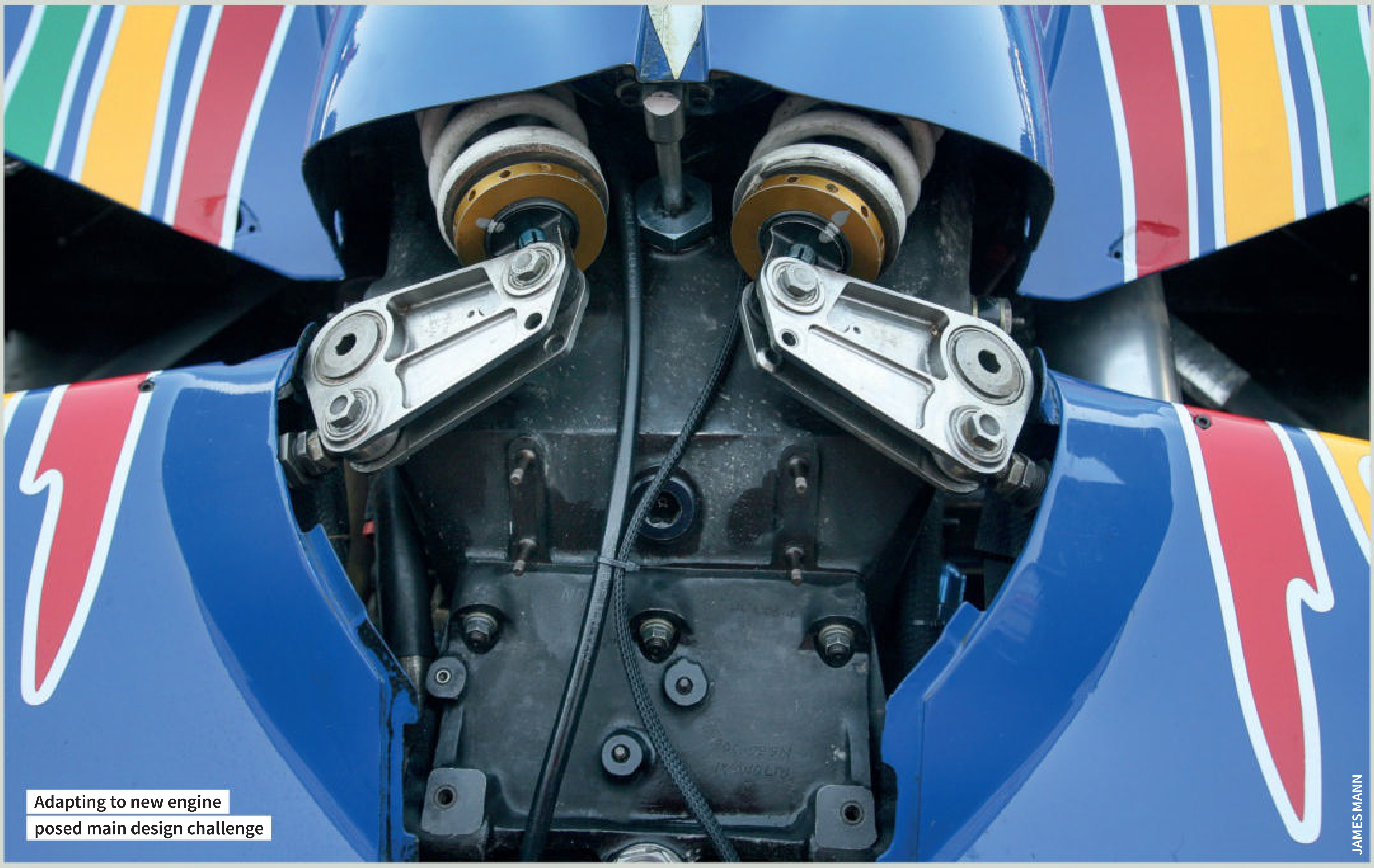
B195's narrow 'sweet spot' could prove elusive

RACE RECORD

Starts	34
Wins	11
Pole positions	4
Fastest laps	8
Podiums	4
Championship points	137

SPECIFICATION

Chassis	Carbon fibre monocoque
Suspension	Double wishbone, pushrod-actuated torsion bars/dampers
Engine	Renault RS7 67-degree V10, naturally aspirated
Engine capacity	2992cc
Power	675bhp @ 15,200rpm
Gearbox	Six-speed transverse semi-automatic
Brakes	Carbon discs
Tyres	Goodyear
Weight	595kg (including driver)
Notable drivers	Michael Schumacher Johnny Herbert


JAMES MANN

Adapting to new engine posed main design challenge

Schuey's elbows out in bid to pass Alesi at the Nurburgring

PASCAL RONDEAU/ALLSPORT/GETTY IMAGES

Constructors' crown sealed for Benetton at Suzuka

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

> **"A MAN KNOWN TO BE HANDY IN THE WET, HE INSISTED THE MOMENT OF SNAP OVERSTEER WAS THE FAULT OF THE CAR RATHER THAN THE DRIVER"**

GETTY IMAGES

If Benetton had hoped to turn the page on its supposed indiscretions, the aspiration lasted no longer than the season opener at Interlagos, where it had to defend itself on two fronts. First, Schumacher's miraculous weight gain: in the previous rules, car minimum weight was 515kg, but now it had been raised to 595kg... including the driver, whose weight would be recorded at the start of the season. Schumacher made a mockery of the concept by tipping the scales at 77kg – 8kg more than he weighed the previous season. Unless he really had piled on the pounds, Benetton would be able to run his car 8kg lighter, which was worth at least a tenth of a second or more per lap. Furious, Mosley directed that Schumacher be weighed post-race – 71.5kg. The assumption was that he had either drunk copious quantities of water or brought a specially weighted crash helmet to the scales. It turned out to be the former. To avoid this loophole, all drivers are now subject to post-race checks.

Before the race, race director Charlie Whiting had informed both Benetton and Williams that samples of their Elf fuel had returned a different chemical 'fingerprint' to the one given pre-season. Not that this would have a tremendous effect on two of the four drivers: polesitter Damon Hill had a slow start and later retired when his FW17 lost second gear and spun, while Herbert struggled in the spare B195 and retired with accident damage. Schumacher won with David Coulthard second in the other Williams, though they were both disqualified. Elf challenged this with all its might, on the grounds that the samples had been tested on different equipment and by different entities, resulting in a partial backdown by the FIA. Schumacher and Coulthard were reinstated, but their teams scored no constructors' points and were fined $200,000 each. A most peculiar conclusion that satisfied none of the parties concerned, save perhaps the governing body's accountants.

Before the appeal was heard, Hill won the Argentinian GP in Buenos Aires while Schumacher laboured to third, over 30s in arrears, on the bumpy and dirty track surface. Coulthard was forced out with a fly-by-wire throttle glitch, while Herbert was a lapped and unhappy fourth. Both Benetton drivers found their cars sporadically ran out of grip and the B195's somewhat petulant manners didn't help; Herbert would cite this as the weekend where his relationship with the team began to sour as it became clear to him that Schumacher's needs would always take priority.

Without question the B195 was less well-balanced than its predecessor, with a narrower 'sweet spot' the team found harder to locate. Naturally this led to Benetton becoming still more Schumacher-centric to avoid losing too much ground to Williams – for at this point in the season, defeat was looking likely. Come round three, at an Imola now bedecked with temporary chicanes at any remotely fast corner, Schumacher qualified on pole... then got caught out in wet-to-drying conditions on race day, smiting the wall within half a lap of pitting for slicks. For a man known to be handy in the wet, it was rather embarrassing, and he insisted the moment of snap oversteer on the crest at Piratella was the fault of the car rather than the driver.

Hill therefore registered another win, Herbert was seventh and two laps down. Some journalists were beginning to compose their season reviews already. But Benetton insisted its performance issues were a consequence of some sub-optimal but fixable design problems, combined with a relative lack of pre-season testing mileage caused by the Renault engine's high-frequency vibrations triggering component breakages. Resource that should have been expended on performance was devoted to troubleshooting instead.

Familiar excuses but next time out, after a highly productive test, Schumacher set pole position at Barcelona by sixth tenths of a second from Jean Alesi's second-placed Ferrari, and Hill was almost a second slower. From first practice, where he had struggled for balance and grip before making substantial overnight set-up changes, the reigning champion had found nearly two seconds. He won the race seemingly at a canter and, as a bonus, Hill slowed from second place when his FW17's hydraulics sprung a leak on the final lap, enabling Herbert to inherit second.

From this point on it was virtually one-way traffic as Schumacher defeated Hill again in Monaco, ceded certain victory in Canada to Alesi, when he needed to pit for a new steering wheel, then won again in France, where Benetton introduced a revised airbox and front wing. Hill's title challenge evaporated over the summer and early autumn; when he wasn't being shown the way by Schumacher, he was clouting other cars on track in a desperate attempt to pass, as at Silverstone, Monza and the Nurburgring.

In Britain, Hill's clumsy challenge on Schumacher eliminated them both and opened the way for Herbert to take a well-deserved maiden victory, albeit too late to avert his eventual firing for a second time. At Monza, another avoidable collision sparked an angry trackside confrontation between the championship protagonists. At the 'Ring, Damon collided with Alesi, then spun off in the wet – becoming a spectator as Schumacher made amends for the Imola imbroglio. Making three stops to Alesi's one left Michael needing to make up a 22s deficit in 15 laps, which he accomplished with two to spare, nailing a dramatic second victory on home soil that year.

By this point it was known that Schumacher would be driving for Ferrari in 1996. Less well-known was that Williams management had quietly decided that Hill was no longer the man for the job. Coulthard, too, was drifting out of favour despite seven podium finishes, plus a win at Estoril in the revised FW17B with its concealed cleverness between the rear wheels. When McLaren made Coulthard an offer he couldn't refuse, Williams didn't get involved in a bidding war.

The European GP at the Nurburging was round 14 of 17 – less busy times – and, as the F1 circus headed east and then south, Schumacher put the drivers' title out of Hill's mathematical reach by winning from third in the Pacific GP at the unloved Aida circuit. At Suzuka a week later, Schumacher won again and both Williams drivers spun out, enabling Benetton to seal the constructors' championship with one round to go.

Hill duly won in Adelaide but it was too little, too late, in what was arguably the faster car of the season. Certainly Williams thought so, and planned for the future accordingly.

At Benetton, Briatore patted the team's first constructors' championship trophy and looked towards a future where new recruits Alesi and Gerhard Berger would slot seamlessly into the gap left by Schumacher and Herbert, continuing the victorious trend. That bit didn't go quite as he imagined...

Maurice Hamilton's

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

As irrepressible as he was unpredictable, Eddie Jordan was a one-off. His charm, unabashed cheek and love of the craic enriched Formula 1 and the lives of so many

PHOTOGRAPHY **SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES**

You never knew what he was going to say next. This, depending on the circumstances, could be either the worry or the joy of dealing with Eddie Jordan. It was usually the latter, given his love of being a renegade with a fast tongue; a chancer with an eye for the main opportunity – and ones you'd never dream of.

EJ was a loveable rascal who proudly played the Irish card to the limit. Conversations would nearly always end with a grin, either because of his twinkling humour, or through your sense of disbelief at the outrageous nature of machine-gun comments made with that lilting brogue. The only time to worry was when he spoke quietly through the side of his mouth. That usually meant he was up to no good. And yet you would wonder at the audacity of the latest plan, admire the chutzpah. It's not an exaggeration to say there was never a dull moment when Edmund Patrick Jordan was in your presence.

Friday breakfasts for the British Formula 1 media outside the Benson & Hedges Jordan motorhome would be a perfect example. EJ usually arrived not long after the bacon and eggs had been served. The canvas awning would be whipped back. Quickly sizing up his captive audience, Eddie would begin hurling insults at the nearest table while jabbing a finger at the next as his voice rose in company with the bawdy invective. Ribald responses from his guests would be grist to the Jordan mill. For a quick thinker such as EJ, this was pure theatre. For regular members of the media circus, giving as good as you got – or trying to – became a fortnightly ritual.

Such a rowdy assembly was unique, certainly in F1 if not in the wider world of sport. Proof came one morning when a journalist new to F1 was invited along. Not having been warned about the impending verbal tsunami, the poor man at first went pale and then looked aghast as his host's insults rose in crescendo and indecency. It had to be explained that this was how Jordan used slagging as a term of endearment and raised it to an art form.

Underlying the blarney would be a profound sense of decency. On the weekend of the 1998 Hungarian Grand Prix, I happened to be with EJ in the Jordan motorhome when news came through of the Omagh bombing, the worst atrocity in the so-called Troubles. Appalled and shocked, we watched in silence. The fact that we were from opposite sides of the

Irish border may have induced perpetual insults in the past. On this occasion, it added to a deep sense of sadness for the island of Ireland. At least eight members and associates of the Jordan team were of Irish extraction.

Eddie was moved to tears when he received a letter from a surgeon, telling the story of a young patient, Alister Hall, who had lost a leg in the explosion at Omagh. When Alister came round, the first thing he wanted to know was how Jordan had got on during qualifying in Hungary. A couple of weekends later, Damon Hill and Eddie were playing in a charity golf match in the south of Ireland. Jordan arranged for them to fly north in a friend's helicopter and land at Altnagelvin Hospital, a major facility dealing with many of the Omagh casualties, including Hall. It was a low-key visit but the effect was huge. "We found Alister and also visited other kids who had lost limbs," said EJ. "They were overjoyed. Typical of children, these brave patients did not think they were as ill as they obviously were. It made us realise that there are much harder battles being fought than anything we might endure in our sport."

Jordan raised millions for CLIC Sargent, a charity focusing on cancer in children and young people. He did it by cajoling the good and the great from motor racing and the world of music to take part and donate to charity events. It was no coincidence that these occasions were filled with 'great craic' – as EJ would say when describing the good time had by all when parting with money. Jordan would use the same modus operandi when dealing with sponsors, his search for finance breathtaking in its effrontery and dexterity, a potent mix of self-assurance and sleight of hand. His love of the deal was matched by a passion for the sport and everything associated with it.

F1 in the 1990s and Eddie Jordan were made for each other. I saw that at close hand when writing a fly-on-the-wall account of his season in 1993. It was a difficult year, Jordan failing to score a single point until the penultimate round in Japan. But at no stage did Eddie exercise the power of veto even though, at times, there were anxious looks across the garage as I noted a self-inflicted setback. Being party to this intimate record of his team's struggle was intriguing in itself, but the best bit came at a book signing in Dublin.

Jordan Grand Prix enjoyed a loyal and enthusiastic home following
JORDAN GRAND PRIX
IRISH
SUPPORTERS CLUB

"You never knew what was coming next. But you understood it would be extraordinary"

Hamilton feels privileged to have been along for the ride

The queue went round the block. And the banter from Jordan was non-stop, regardless of the customer's age or gender. An attractive lady, proffering her copy for signing, made the mistake of saying she'd known Eddie back in his teenage years. Eddie looked up. "Ah, sure!" he grinned. "I remember you. In the back of a Cortina, wasn't it? Down on Dollymount Strand?" The woman rolled her eyes at the reference to a local beach well-known for activities other than swimming. "Y'a haven't bloody changed!" she replied, before roaring with laughter.

Five years later, at another book launch in Dublin, he had indeed remained the same – apart from appearing in a purple suit with matching suede boots. This was a better managed affair in the function room of a smart hotel. Eddie made a speech – try stopping him – in which, ever the opportunist, he managed to slide in a mention of a deal just signed with a new Irish sponsor.

Apart from the interminable flow of Guinness, I remember the evening for another reason. Earlier, during a difficult year, Jordan had taken its first GP win at Spa. Vincent Logan of the *The Irish Independent* had been covering an All-Ireland semi-final at Dublin's Croke Park on that day. He said you could sense a gradual buzz as word began to spread that the Jordan team – the home team; EJ's team – was actually doing well. People were listening on their radios and, by the end of the race, the frisson of excitement had become an electric charge surging through the entire ground. Logan said he had never experienced anything like it.

That was the Eddie Jordan effect. You never knew what was coming next. But you understood it would be extraordinary, one way or the other. It was a privilege to have been part of such a brilliant, vibrant journey.

SUTTON/FORMULA1

THE SAFETY CAR DRIVER

BERND MAYLANDER

You may well think the job of a safety car driver is only about driving slowly in front of a bunch of F1 cars if there's any hazard on track. While that's the most visible part, there's a lot more to it. Bernd Maylander kept a diary throughout the opening round of the championship in Australia for Autosport

OLEG KARPOV

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

THURSDAY

Melbourne in general is a special weekend, with a lot of activity on track as well, with local series being there too. The whole of Thursday, unlike at other events on the calendar, there's track activity, with Australian Porsche Carrera Cup and Supercars drivers doing their practice and qualifying sessions.

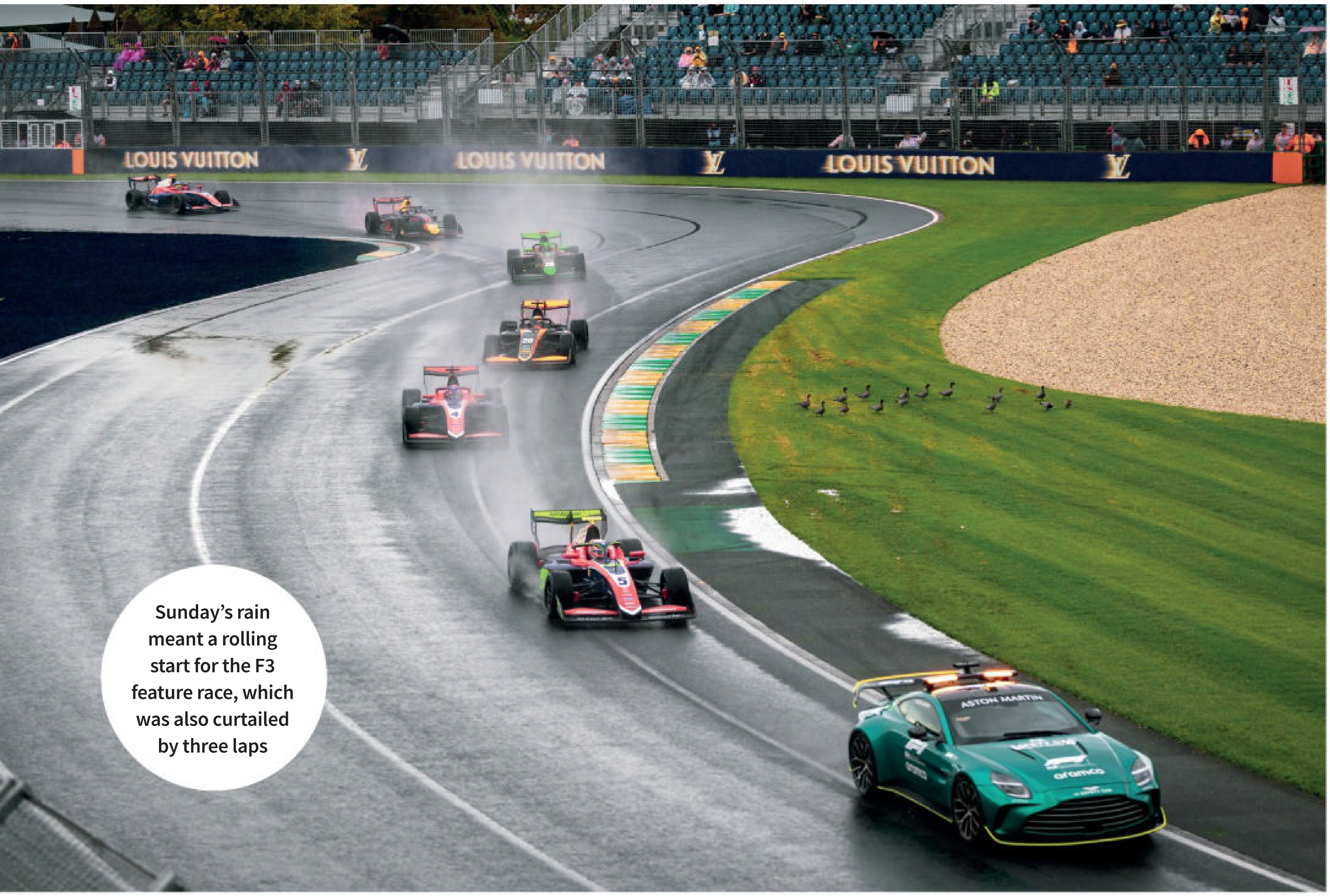
So, our weekend in Australia actually starts on Wednesday – and that's when we follow the procedures we usually do on Thursdays at other tracks. That includes the track walk, which is usually to check if there are any changes compared to last year, be it kerbs, run-off areas and so on. Then, one of the main parts of the programme is our track test: we check if everything is working correctly, from our own comms system to starting lights and light panels around the track, and then move on to running through different scenarios. We'd try to replicate something like an aborted start procedure or a red flag – and that's not only us, but race control as well. So we'd be communicating with Rui Marques, our race director, as if it were in the race situation.

Sometimes on street tracks especially we simulate some unusual scenarios, like putting an obstacle on the track in some corners – usually, it's something simple, like throwing a plastic bottle onto the track. That's also a test for the marshals: we need to see the double yellow flag signal on the light panels and wait for the clerk of the course to clear the marshals to go and pick up whatever that is. It's all about playing with different kinds of scenarios, which vary throughout the year – and it's always good to get some additional practice.

Then, my Thursday in Melbourne was actually quite relaxed. But I had an opportunity to jump into the medical car as well for another test we did for Formula 3, as that championship now has a new car. But apart from that, it was quite a calm day for me.

FRIDAY

It gets busier as the weekend progresses. On Friday it was an early start. We arrived at the track just after 7am, which is early, but also nice, as there aren't too many fans yet and the drive in is free from traffic. And as we also finish quite late, when we leave the track it's



Sunday's rain meant a rolling start for the F3 feature race, which was also curtailed by three laps

SANTANU BANIK/SPEED MEDIA/ICON SPORTSWIRE

Maylander consults with FIA colleagues

SUTTON/FORMULA1

not a problem for us either!

Before the first sessions, we do another track test. All the marshals are already in their positions – and it's good practice for them as well. As FIA, we're responsible for our championships only, so apart from F1 in Melbourne, it was F2 and F3 as well. But during their sessions, as we have no races on Friday, I'm free – simply because the safety car is not needed: whenever there's an issue, race control just red flags the session.

I also attend the drivers' meetings in the evening to answer any questions drivers may have. But this time the main discussion was about swearing, which isn't my concern. Sometimes we do discuss other things if they have questions from previous events.

And in between, I have some things to keep myself busy with, including doing some hot laps with guests or VIPs, which is always fun.

SATURDAY

The first race for me on Saturday was the F3 sprint, and for all the series it's more or » less the same procedure. Before the pitlane opens for the race, I'm already on the starting grid, with 20 minutes to spare.

When I do my lap to the grid, no other cars should be around the track anymore – and so, by the time the pitlane opens, I'm already in my position in front of the grid. That's when it's time to get out of the car. I usually spend some time just observing, chatting to people – and then get back in 10 minutes before the start of the formation lap. I leave that spot five minutes before the start of the formation lap, and then take a position for the start of the race, which is right behind the pit entry.

I park the car on the spot and stay there until the actual start. That's because if there's a crash on the grid and race control decides that drivers must go through the pitlane, I need to be in the position from which I can guide them. That's been standard procedure since Ralf Schumacher's crash at Indianapolis some 20 years ago – we decided back then that if there's an accident on the grid, we'd drive through the pitlane rather than near the crash scene. And if everything is all right, I just return to the pits and take my position towards the pitlane exit.

While I'm there, I mainly watch the TV we have in the car, and also follow the GPS map with the cars on track. It allows you to be more aware of what's happening – always having in mind who's leading the race and where they are currently on track.

We also get information if there's a big crash, including the g-force. It doesn't change anything in my procedure, as it's more important for the medical car, but it's good to understand how big the accident was.

It was quite a busy afternoon. I went out three times during the F3 race, and then again in F2 – but just once.

SUNDAY

With the weather change, we knew Sunday was going to be tricky. As always, ahead of the running we did a track test, which meant another early arrival at the track. The procedure itself doesn't change if the track is wet, but conditions are of course a bit trickier.

We managed to run the F3 feature race, this time with a rolling start procedure. We decided to stop it three laps before the end as the rain intensified, just to be on the safe side. And then for F2, conditions just didn't improve enough. In such situations, I follow the race director's instructions and give him the feedback he needs. And this time, there was just a lot of standing water around the track – especially from Turn 7 onwards, and also on the entry to Turns 9 and 10. There

Australia
MEL
QATA
AIRW
SC
FIA
MELBOURNE
ASTON MARTIN
aramco
SAFETY CAR

Seventeen laps in total were clocked up by the safety car in Melbourne

ORACLE
Red Bull

There's always time for a chat with a world champion

SUTTON/FORMULA 1

> *"It was not too typical of recent years – a lot of races go by without the need for me to leave the pitlane. Thankfully, I'm not paid per lap!"*

MELBOURNE
Australia
FIA
EXIT
Australia
SC

TEE

Maylander enjoyed chance to push during time on track

SUTTON/FORMULA 1

was standing water on the apex – and that's a difficult one. It was simply too dangerous to start the race. Our job is to make sure we stay on the safe side, so in the end we just decided to stop the race.

The F1 race was an eventful one, too. The preparation for that one is a bit longer than for other categories, so it starts one hour before the formation lap. This time it's the race director himself who brings the car to the grid – because it's the last opportunity to do the track inspection for him. It's been like this since Charlie Whiting was doing the job, and now Rui Marques. It's what we call a closing lap, to make sure the track is fully ready for the main event.

I take the car over on the starting grid. And then there's basically one hour to soak in the atmosphere, see friends, drivers, team members. When the national anthem begins, I should already be somewhere close to the car – and with 10 minutes before the formation lap, I jump in together with my co-driver. Like others, five minutes before the start, I disappear from the grid and take the same position near the pitlane entry, just before it.

We aborted the first start because of Isack Hadjar's crash, and then we had another accident with Jack Doohan on the first lap, so I collected the cars from my position at the pitlane entry. Then Carlos Sainz crashed in the last corner and we guided the cars through the pitlane until the scene was cleared. And with Fernando Alonso crashing towards the end, I did 17 laps in total. That hasn't happened in a while, I must say!

I did enjoy driving, by the way. The track is really nice and, as there was no standing water, I could push. But unfortunately I can't win the race, so there's no need to be at 100%. I'm always on the safe side. Yet still, it was really pleasant for me as a driver to do so many laps. But that, as I said, was not too typical of recent years – a lot of races go by without the need for me to leave the pitlane. Thankfully, I'm not paid per lap!

After the finish, we always do a quick debrief to talk about how the race went. This time there was quite a lot to go through, because we also had a medical car deployment following Doohan's crash. But from the procedural point of view, it all went smoothly. So, it was a perfect way to start the new season.

SCHLEGELMILCH

SHOULD F1 REALLY GO BACK TO V10s?

A retrograde step or a return to Formula 1's core values and appeal? Four differing views on the future of grand prix racing's motive power...

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

THERE SHOULD BE NET ZERO CHANCE OF A RETURN

MARK MANN-BRYANS

Engine manufacturers pour millions into bringing their brands into F1, and of late most have been keen to do so because of the next generation of hybrid regulations from 2026 onwards. Preparations have been under way for a good while, so dropping them for the V10 whim and point-scoring attempt of FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem would be irrational in the extreme.

Even if sustainable gas-guzzlers become a genuine proposition at some stage, it would still be a backward step for a series that has always been at the forefront of advances in the motor industry. F1 has always pushed the envelope, now it seems to want to try and post it with the equivalent of a Penny Black. Accompanying any sustainability announcement from F1 in the past year or so has been the Net-Zero Carbon by 2030 initiative. The championship is heading in one very specific direction and should be applauded for doing so.

Yes, there will be dewy-eyed fans riddled with nostalgia calling for a return to the 'glory days' when drivers were real men and the V10s (or V12s) were proper engines. But the old saying 'you should never go back' rings true here too. That was the past, it belongs in the more sepia-toned editions of Autosport to be celebrated but also to be kept in storage.

"Whether we stay with the current regulations or go with the already approved new regulations – I think Formula 1 would be in a good place," was a recent, disconcertingly vague comment from FIA single-seater director Nikolas Tombazis. Stop. Let's turn attention back to the future, forget the election ploy from the FIA president, and prepare to embrace the next exciting era F1 has to offer.

YES, STOP TRYING TO PLEASE EVERYONE

BEN HUNT

It has been fascinating watching the debate over whether F1 should revert to a V10 engine as it again finds itself at a crossroads of sport, entertainment and business with the ridiculously outdated thought of being road relevant. The evocative V10 option has been mooted purely because it is a sentimental choice for many – but there is no logical reason to return to such old technology, as it strives for a happy medium.

But what sport is happy being in the middle? F1 has frequently found itself facing an identity crisis as it attempts to tick too many boxes. One moment it is focused on reducing carbon footprints, and the next it's signing lucrative sponsorship deals with oil-dependent cruise ship companies. You cannot have both.

Is it not time that, instead of attempting to satisfying the appetite for competing ambitions, it focused on the entertainment aspect? Turning F1 into a real spectacle should be the main focus here and that starts with the regulations. If that is the case, then surely an ear-splitting, flame-producing V10 is an option.

F1 has a real chance to rewrite the rules, to make things easier to understand and with the focus on the show – and that all starts with the cars' engines. So instead of making it overly complicated and unrelatable, stick to something the fans will love.

NO, BRING BACK V12s

STUART CODLING

Nostalgia ain't what it used to be. I'm of an age where, among my rough contemporaries, Jon Pertwee or Tom Baker was 'your' Dr Who – depending on who occupied the role when you started watching.

Demographics surely play a role in the peculiar rose-tinted veneration of F1's V10 era: the people most noisily advocating for the return of this engine format grow dewy-eyed at the thought of the 1990s and early 2000s. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but pivoting back to V10s now would turn F1 into a very expensive *madeleine de Proust.*

Advocates say we need the noise. Well, the V10 scream was certainly loud and visceral. But at the risk of pointing out the Emperor's palpable sate of undress – it wasn't a very nice noise, was it?

F1's direction of travel over the past two decades has been dictated by efficiency and road-relevance. If we're going to toss that into the dumpster, and at the same time add a whole bunch of reciprocating masses to the engine simply to make a noise, why not do the job properly?

Enzo Ferrari once recounted an encounter with Herbert von Karajan, wherein the eminent Austrian conductor opined: "Listening to your V12 brings forth a harmony that no maestro will ever be able to interpret." I would no more argue with Enzo Ferrari than I would with the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. If noise be the food of F1, play on – with a V12.

LET'S BE EVEN MORE RADICAL

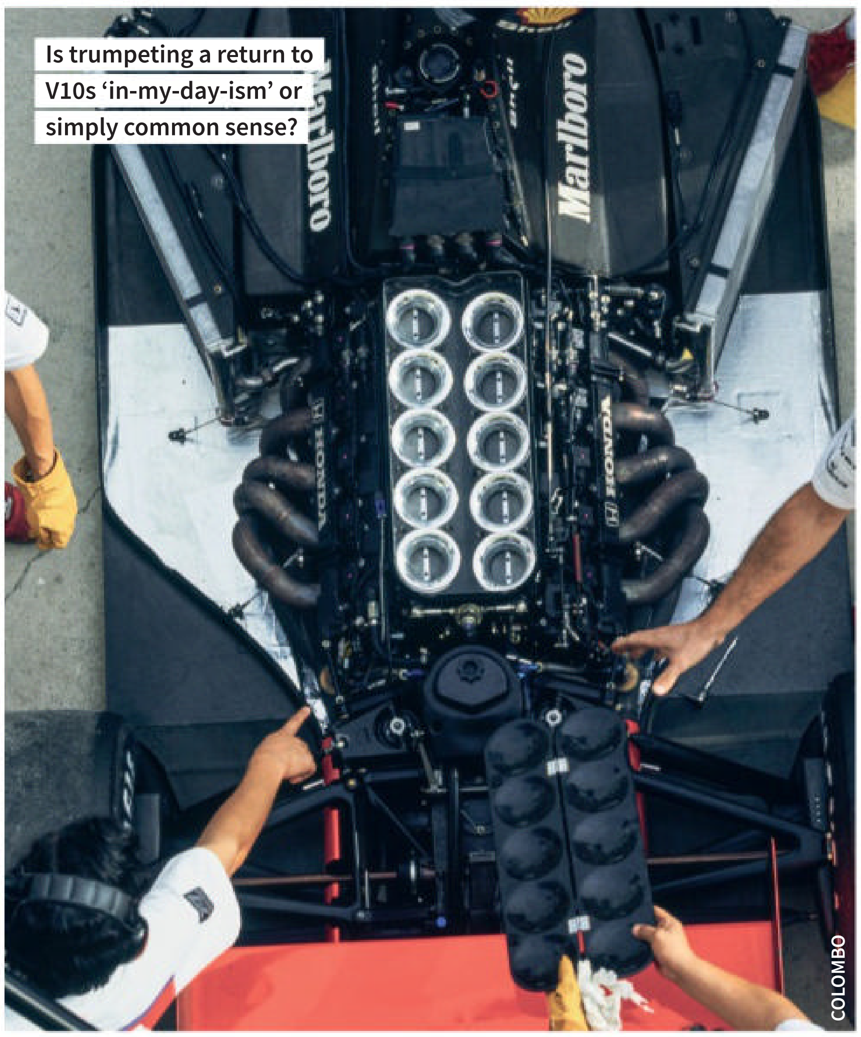
JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Regulations in F1 have always been about controlling 'inputs', rather than the output. In other words, the regulations effectively comprise a long list of dos and do-nots, much to the chagrin of creatively minded design engineers. And, as much as the restrictions have brought some degree of parity in the current season, every team feels like it's reaching a point of homogeneity. You could argue that they spend $135million a year to design the same car.

So, let's do something different with engines: rather than funnel everyone into the same layout, why not control overall outputs? Mandate an 800kW maximum output, 120kg powertrain weight, and other output restrictions like torque and the like, and let the manufacturers have at it. Want to persist with a 1.6-litre V6 turbo-hybrid? You can. Want to switch to a 3.5-litre 1000bhp V10? You can. Want to say 'to hell with it' and go for a W12, or an H16, or something else that's silly and likely flawed? You can.

It's a little bit akin to how the World Endurance Championship operates, where manufacturers largely have freedom to pursue whatever engine concepts tickle their fancy. There are turbocharged and naturally aspirated V8s, there's a range of V6s, and Aston Martin has thrown its V12 in the mix. Each engine supplier can put their own stamp on the formula, obviously under a cost and resource-controlled environment.

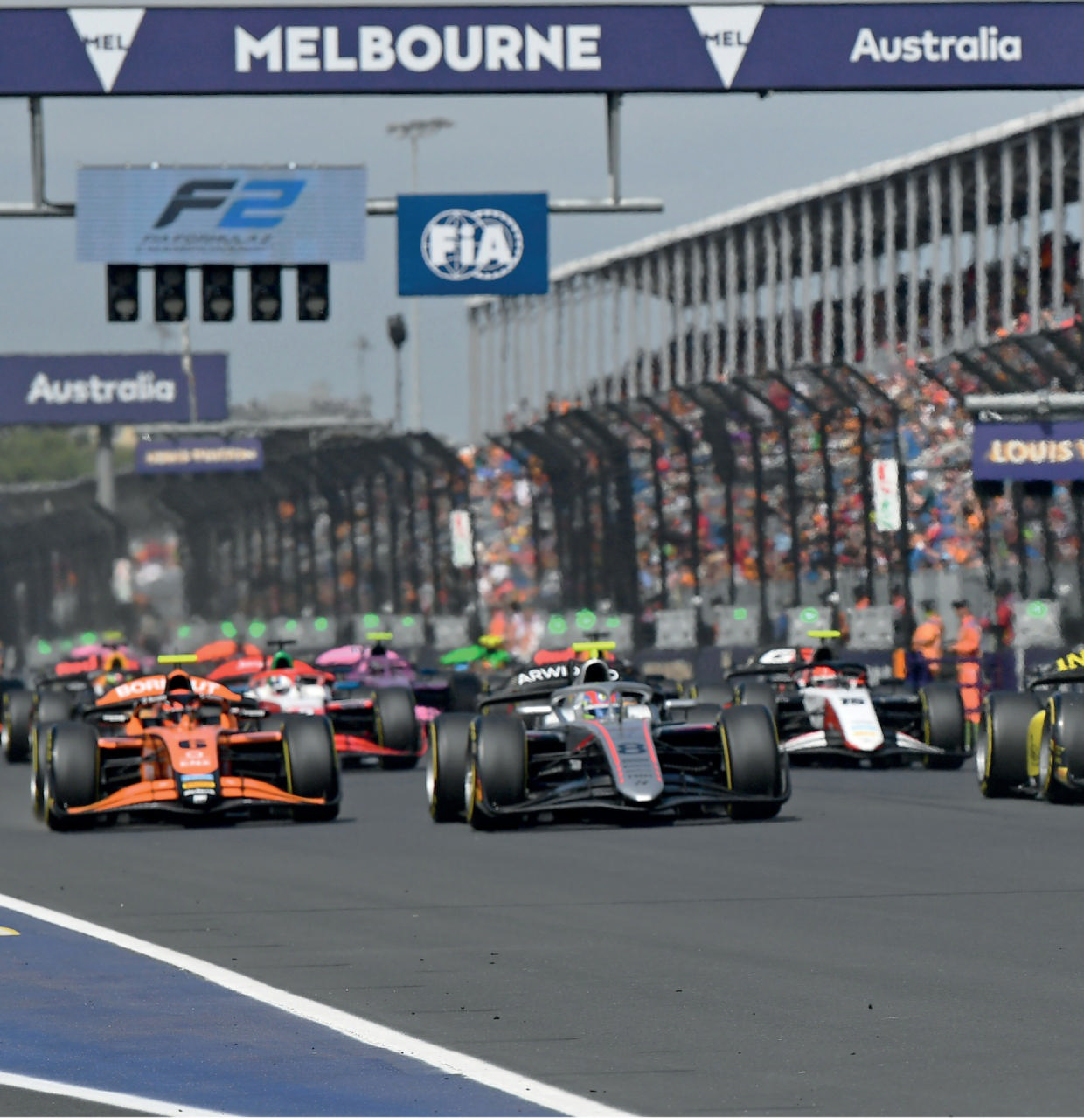
Ferrari could, if it wanted, turn up to the party with an all-singing, all-dancing flat-12 that wails like a banshee, drowning out a big-bore Cadillac V8 as it roars through the trees at Spa-Francorchamps…



Is trumpeting a return to V10s 'in-my-day-ism' or simply common sense?

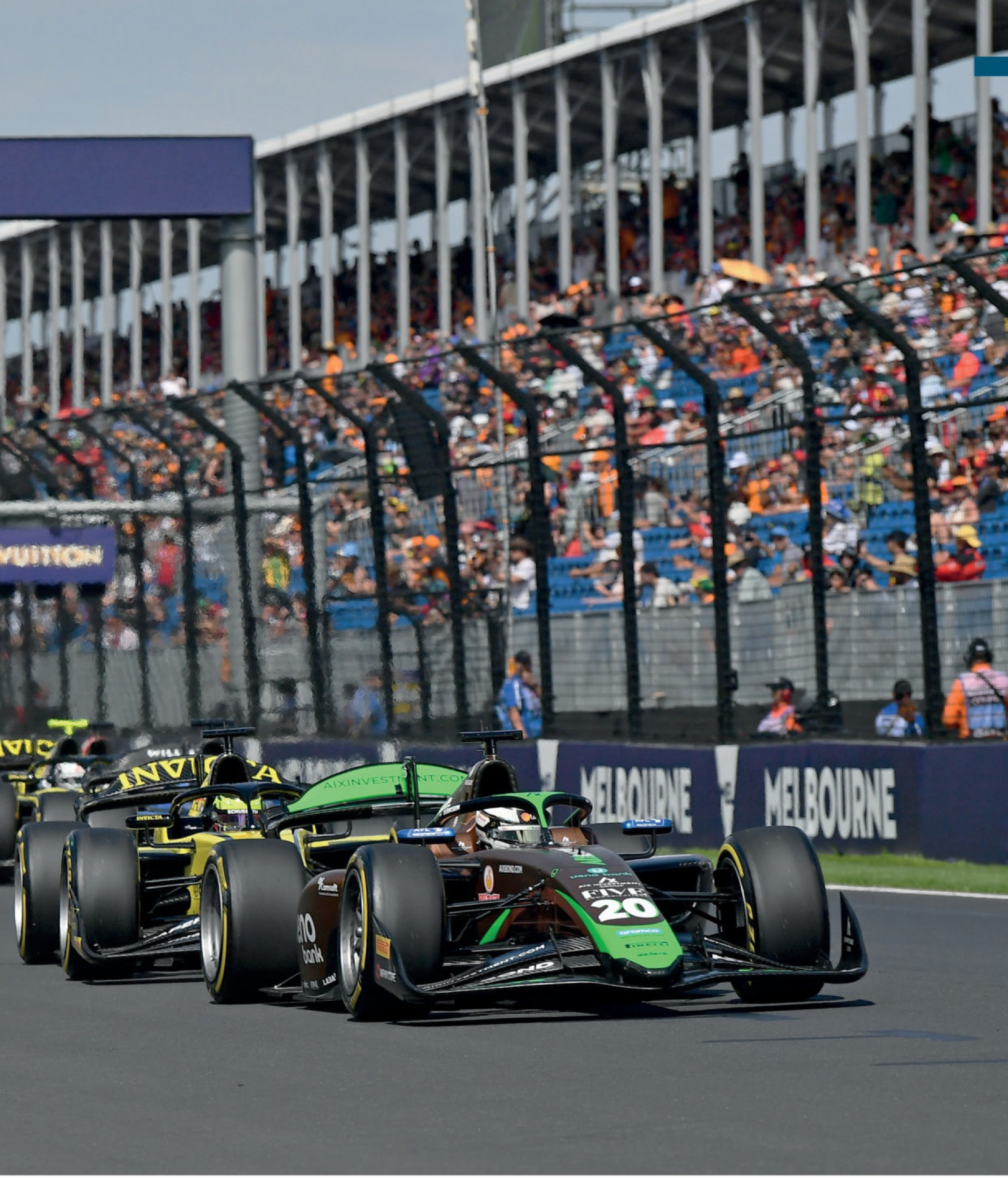
COLOMBO

To watch a video of this debate go to youtube.com/@AutosportOfficial



Attention, Asuncion

Paraguayan Formula 2 hero Joshua Durksen gets the jump on the field in Melbourne, after he which he went on to claim his third win in the series at the opening round. The AIX Racing driver got a better start than polesitting reigning F3 champion Leonardo Fornaroli, the Invicta Racing-run Italian beating Hitech's British Williams protege Luke Browning to second spot. This was the reversed-grid race, with the feature event falling victim to the awful weather after some exploratory laps. ART Grand Prix's third-year F2 driver Victor Martins had claimed pole, but only after rookie Gabriele Mini (Prema Racing) was penalised for impeding. Durksen therefore leads the points with two hopefully sunny Middle Eastern rounds coming up.


LOUIS VUITTON
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20

Photographer James Sutton
Formula Motorsport Limited/Getty Images

Where Melbourne, Australia
When Saturday 15 March 2025

Details Nikon D5, 1/2500th @ F5.6

Palou is chased by Lundgaard

HURLEY/PEC

INDYCAR

PALOU RIDES THE THERMAL CURRENT FOR ANOTHER WIN

Alex Palou continued his perfect start to the IndyCar Series season by making it two wins out of two at the Thermal Club in California. The reigning champion, who is chasing a fourth title this year, made fantastic use of tyre strategy to follow up his win in the St Petersburg opener. This allowed Palou to take the lead in the final stint and pull away to victory.

Palou's Honda-powered Chip Ganassi Racing car beat Pato O'Ward to the chequered flag by 10 seconds, while Christian Lundgaard completed a 2-3 for the Chevrolet-engined Arrow McLaren team after both were passed by Palou.

O'Ward got the perfect start from pole, while Lundgaard came out on top of a first-lap battle with Palou for second. The race, the first IndyCar championship round to take place on this sinuous switchback circuit, featured minimal wheel-to-wheel action at the front in the early stages.

It was only after the third and final round of pitstops that this began to change. Palou had kept his set of fresh alternate 'red' tyres for the final stint, while O'Ward and Lundgaard went onto the primary 'blacks'. Palou emerged from the pitlane on the tail of Lundgaard to reignite the battle for second, and the duo had a thrilling pass-and-repass fight as the Spaniard got heat into his rubber before the Dane was finally dispatched.

Like Sylvester Stallone suddenly finding an extra gear in *Driven*, Palou then slashed the 10s gap to O'Ward before passing the Mexican at Turn 7 with 10 laps remaining, then pulling away.

Colton Herta was in the top five throughout, but had to repass the sister Andretti Global car of Kyle Kirkwood in the final stint before taking fourth place. Herta was later found to have incorrectly attached anti-wishbone-intrusion plates and was docked 10 points, but kept his position. As Kirkwood dropped to finish eighth, Herta only just held on to beat the Meyer Shank Racing car of Felix Rosenqvist.

Team Penske star Will Power fought from 21st on the grid to sixth.

ED HARDY & TRAVIS DAYE

Somehow Palou always gets the last laugh

SKIBINSKI/PEC

FORMULA 2/3

RAIN CAN'T STOP CAMARA CLICKING IN MELBOURNE

Safety car driver Bernd Maylander – predictably – and the wet weather – less so – were the main winners as the Formula 2 and 3 seasons kicked off in Melbourne. The F3 field at least managed to get a feature race of sorts done during their customary early-morning slot on Sunday, before the increasing intensity of the downpour led to the F2 centrepiece being canned.

Reigning Formula Regional European champion Rafael Camara did a superb job to top qualifying on his F3 debut with Trident, and the Brazilian led from the safety car start before the race went under caution almost immediately. Camara then serenely led team-mate Noah Stromsted and Theophile Nael (Van Amersfoort Racing) for seven laps before a shunt for Christian Ho brought the safety car out again.

While it was circulating, the rain began bucketing down and finally the red flags flew.

On Saturday, seven laps of hectic green-flag racing were squeezed in between 13 laps of safety car in the dry sprint. Santiago Ramos of VAR withstood the attack of Hitech-run McLaren junior Martinius Stenshorne for victory, with Rodin Motorsport's Anglo-Pole Roman Bilinski in third.

In F2, Prema Racing's exciting Sicilian F3 graduate Gabriele Mini was quickest in qualifying but lost pole to a grid penalty for impeding Jak Crawford. This meant that third-year driver Victor Martins lined his ART car up at the front of the feature race, but the event never got going from an attempted safety car start.

Joshua Durksen of AIX Racing took victory in the sprint race on Saturday from F3 graduates Leonardo Fornaroli (Invicta Racing) and Luke Browning (Hitech).

Six drivers from three teams – DAMS, Rodin Motorsport and Trident – were all given hefty 10-place grid penalties for both F2 races in Melbourne after their teams were discovered to have been drilling spec parts to illegally measure aerodynamic loads in pre-season testing in Bahrain. This had been done in an apparent attempt to gain additional data on car airflow other than that provided to all teams as part of the series' spec arrangement.

Camara mastered wet and dry in Australia

WEST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

TATSUYA ENDO

Mugen pair Iwasa (left) and Nojiri lead away

IWASA IN FIELD OF DANDELIONS

Racing Bulls Formula 1 reserve Ayumu Iwasa came away with the early Super Formula series lead for Team Mugen after a pair of Suzuka races won by Dandelion Racing drivers.

Kakunoshin Ohta and Tadasuke Makino won a race apiece in the opening double-header, but neither scored big points in both races.

After narrowly beating Iwasa to win the opener, Ohta earned a five-second penalty in race two for an illegal pass on the ex-F2 race winner at the chicane. That dropped him from second behind Makino to 12th as the field bunched up behind the safety car late in the race.

Makino was a victim of Dandelion having to double-stack its drivers in the pits in an incident-strewn opener, restricting him to 10th.

It means Iwasa, who followed his runner-up finish in the opener with third in the second race, leads the title race by seven points from reigning champion Sho Tsuboi (TOM'S), with Ohta and Makino just behind.

JAMIE KLEIN

FOTOSPEEDY

Nielsen broke cover at Barcelona test

NIELSEN INTO SINGLE-SEATERS

Title-winning LMP2 and LMP3 team Nielsen Racing has taken the plunge into single-seaters for this season, and will run a three-car team in Euroformula Open for the old philosophy of F3 cars.

This is EFO's first season with the Dallara 324 powered by the spec, three-cylinder, 1.6-litre TOM'S GTE33 engine based on the powerplant from Toyota GR Yaris road car, and successfully used in Japan's similar Super Formula Lights series in 2024.

"Our goal is to establish ourselves quickly and build on our success in endurance racing," said David 'Sven' Thompson, boss of the Corby team. "The series holds special significance for me personally, as I worked as a mechanic in Euroformula Open before founding Nielsen Racing."

Briton Edward Pearson and American Shawn Rashid, both graduates of the GB3 series in the UK, have been named as the first two drivers for Nielsen.

GETTY/RED BULL

First F1 Academy win for Palmowski

RACE WINNERS 8 March - 30 March

INDYCAR SERIES

Thermal Club 23 March
1 **Alex Palou** (Chip Ganassi Racing)
2 **Pato O'Ward** (Arrow McLaren)
3 **Christian Lundgaard** (Arrow McLaren)

POINTS 1 **Palou** 102; 2 O'Ward 63; 3 Scott Dixon 61.

FORMULA 2

Melbourne 15-16 March
Race 1 **Joshua Durksen** (AIX Racing)
Race 2 Abandoned

POINTS 1 **Durksen** 10; 2 Leonardo Fornaroli 8; 3 Luke Browning 6.

FORMULA 3

Melbourne 15-16 March
Race 1 **Santiago Ramos** (Van Amersfoort Racing)
Race 2 **Rafael Camara** (Trident)

POINTS 1 **Camara** 28; 2 Theophile Nael 19; 3 Noah Stromsted 18.

SUPER FORMULA

Suzuka 8-9 March
Race 1 **Kakunoshin Ohta** (Dandelion Racing)
Race 2 **Tadasuke Makino** (Dandelion Racing)

POINTS 1 **Ayumu Iwasa** 30; 2 Sho Tsuboi 23; 3 Ohta 22.

F1 ACADEMY

Shanghai 22-23 March
Race 1 **Alisha Palmowski** (Campos Racing)
Race 2 **Doriane Pin** (Prema Racing)

POINTS 1 **Pin** 31; 2 Maya Weug 26; 3 Chloe Chambers 24.

THE VINTAGE SPORTS-CAR CLUB

2025 RACE CALENDAR

Saturday 24 May
Donington Park

Saturday 21 June
Cadwell Park

Saturday 30 August
Mallory Park

OUR CLUB

SPEED TICKETS

2025 SPEED CALENDAR

Sunday 4 May
Curborough Speed Trials

Sunday 11 May
Wiscombe Park Hill Climb

Saturday 7 June
Harewood Hill Climb

Sunday 6 July
Shelsley Walsh Hill Climb

Saturday 2 & Sunday 3 August
Vintage Prescott

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 September
Loton Park Hill Climbs

Saturday 20 September
Prescott Long Course Hill Climb

Use code AUTOVSCC for 10% off all Speed Tickets

INSIDER

Slater could break the recent British trend, says Kevin Turner

Young racing drivers tend not to worry too much about history. And why would they? They're far too busy trying to find that extra tenth of a second – or more budget to make the next step up the motorsport ladder.

Freddie Slater, about to start his first season in the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine, has even more reason to ignore the past. British drivers have scored but a single victory – courtesy of Olli Caldwell – since the category first emerged in Europe for the 2019 season.

There was plenty of British success in the series' forerunner, the old Formula Renault Eurocup, which merged with Formula Regional for 2021. That was in part helped by the existence of a strong FR UK championship until 2011, though British success continued long after that – Jack Aitken (2015), Lando Norris (2016) and Max Fewtrell (2018) all took the Eurocup title.

Since then, various developments have combined to minimise British participation in FRECA. British F4 has gained strength since its switch to Tatuus chassis, which brought it into line with the competitive Italian series, in 2022. Some drivers, such as Slater's fellow Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award finalist Arvid Lindblad, have jumped straight from F4 to F3, while other Brits have plumped for the MotorSport Vision-run GB3, which now has most of its rounds on grand prix circuits and has an upgraded machine for 2025.

"Everybody in Britian gets dragged into the British F4 and GB3 route, but I've done things a little differently," says Slater, who was the dominant force in Italian F4 last year, winning 15 of the 20 races he started. "For me, staying with Prema after F4 was crucial and there are so many GP tracks [seven] on the FRECA calendar, which should be beneficial for F3, F2 and hopefully F1. And the weather is better for tyre management.

"That's not to say anything against British racing. You look at when it rains and the drivers who have done racing in Britain are up there, so you need a balance. That's why we're doing some GB3 rounds. Plus, you get to work with different teams and situations. I think adaptability is really important."

As, of course, is seat time, particularly in an era of such limited testing. To warm up for the FRECA campaign, which kicks off on 3-4 May at Misano (where he took a hat-trick in Italian F4), Slater contested Formula Regional Middle East in January and February with the Prema-run Mumbai Falcons. The series uses the same Tatuus chassis as FRECA, but they are Alfa Romeo-powered instead of Renault-motivated and run on Giti tyres rather than Pirellis.

"Even though it was on a different tyre it was beneficial," continues the 16-year-old. "If you don't do it, you're out of the car for however many months before testing starts. It's super-crucial to do, to practise racecraft and things like tyre management. It's learning the way the car handles in different situations, to give me an edge on what to do and what not to do so I don't make the mistakes in the European championship."

Slater took more wins – four – than anyone else but lost out to ART's Evan Giltaire in the Middle East title race. Giltaire, a race winner in FRECA last year, is likely to be one of the main challengers this time around, though Slater refuses to be drawn on who his likely opposition will be.

"You've got to be open-minded," he argues. "Until qualifying at the first round it could be anyone. Some people might be better on the Pirelli or have got a good handle on the car during winter testing."

While Slater is understandably coy about who the potential frontrunners are, we're prepared to throw some names into the hat… As well as Slater and 2023 French F4 champion Giltaire, there's R-ace duo Akshay Bohra (who beat Slater to the 2024 Euro 4 title, though had a mixed FR Middle East campaign) and Toyota-affiliated Jin Nakamura, who was a race winner in Super Formula Lights last year. Fellow Japanese Taito Kato succeeded Giltaire as French F4 pacesetter and joins the Frenchman at ART, which completes its line-up with British F4 and FR Middle East race winner Kanato Le. Sainteloc's Nikita Bedrin is stepping back from Formula 3, where he won at the Hungaroring last year, while Jack Beeton (Prema) and Hiyu Yamakoshi (Van Amersfoort Racing) were the closest thing to rivals Slater had in Italian F4. Thanks to her profile in F1 Academy, which she currently leads, Mercedes junior Doriane Pin will also be one to watch.

> ***"There are so many GP tracks on the calendar, which should be beneficial for F3, F2 – and F1"***

Nevertheless, given his rapid rise so far – which also includes multiple karting crowns, titles in Ginetta Junior and 2024 F4 UAE laurels – Slater has to be regarded as one of the favourites.

"The target is definitely the championship," concedes Slater, who has also recently tested F3 machinery. "Hopefully it will develop me to be a better driver and I'll be fighting for the title."

If he can do that, perhaps he'll then write his own little bit of series history that future British rising single-seater stars won't ignore. Maybe.

2025 HANKOOK
MEXICO CITY E-PRIX
NISSAN
ELECTROMIN
REFLO
Hankook

FERRARO

ROWLAND'S RENAISSANCE

Nissan's leading man is bidding to end Jaguar's and Porsche's stranglehold on Formula E in his second stint at the manufacturer

JAMES NEWBOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

Motorsport history is littered with examples of drivers revisiting old stomping grounds to much fanfare but ultimately disappointing results. Fernando Alonso experienced this multiple times, at Renault (2008-09), McLaren (2015-18) and a third Team Enstone stint (2021-22), each time failing to recapture previous glories.

The still short history of Formula E provides fewer illustrations. The jury is out on Robin Frijns since his return to Envision, likewise Norman Nato at Nissan. But Nato's team-mate Oliver Rowland is categorically demonstrating that resuming a partnership can yield better results second time around.

As the championship leader after four races, of which he has won two, Rowland is flourishing in his second season back with the team he vacated in 2021 for Mahindra. The Rowland-Nissan combination could have been arriving at the next round in Miami unbeaten if not for an overpower issue in Sao Paulo that resulted in a penalty while leading, and Max Guenther's final corner pass in Jeddah. Revisit the 2023-24 campaign, and the signs were there that the Dubai-based Barnsley native could mix it with Formula E's big beasts – Jaguar and Porsche.

Two victories and fourth in the points, despite missing Portland's double-header, made it Rowland's most successful campaign in the all-electric world championship, and was double the win tally from his first three seasons with Nissan. The gradual shift from dark horse to established benchmark is one he admits has been "a pleasant surprise".

"Since I've rejoined Nissan, it's just been a catalogue of expectations exceeded," smiles Rowland. "Last year if we were in the top 10, we were quite happy. We knew we had a bit of an efficiency deficit and it was my first year back. This year we know we've improved our race car, but our qualifying car remains relatively similar. It's not like we have anything revolutionary on that side. We've just been solid."

It's a far cry from the scenario in which Rowland found himself at Mahindra when Gen3 rules arrived for 2023. A troubled testing programme had further implications throughout a difficult second season with the team, capped by a forced withdrawal from Cape Town prompted by rear suspension safety concerns. After a best result of sixth, he walked away with seven races remaining.

Rowland insists that he didn't have anything on the table at that stage and "I was giving up a good salary" for a spell sitting on the sidelines, but on balance didn't see it as a risk. "At the time that I left, I was pretty depressed with the situation," reveals the 2011 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner. "I wasn't happy with my racing anymore, I wasn't enjoying it."

The 'gamble' paid off handsomely when Nissan came calling, drafting in Rowland to replace Nato alongside Sacha Fenestraz. The squad formerly known as Nissan e.dams, still based in France although fully owned by the Japanese manufacturer since 2022, was much-changed; Rowland estimates he'd only worked with around 20% of the personnel before, but crucially "the people in the really key positions knew me from my first stint". These included team principal »

Hankook
ion
NISSAN
23
ROW

PORTLOCK/FORMULAE

FORMULA E POINTS BEFORE MIAMI E-PRIX

1	**Oliver Rowland** (Nissan)	68
2	**Taylor Barnard** (McLaren-Nissan)	51
3	**Antonio Felix da Costa** (Porsche)	39
4	**Maximilian Guenther** (DS Penske)	37
5	**Jake Hughes** (Maserati)	27
6	**Jean-Eric Vergne** (DS Penske)	26

Tommaso Volpe, who arrived in 2020, and team director Dorian Boisdron, previously the team and sporting manager.

"In the beginning there was an element of having to prove myself to the new people," reflects Rowland, whose vanquished Franco-Argentinian team-mate would later remark that "Oliver at his best is easily on a par" with Max Verstappen. "Credit to the people that took me back, Tommaso and Dorian, they believed in me and spread that around the team."

Rowland insists that he hasn't given too much thought to what could have been without the illness that prevented him from travelling to Portland. He was just 11 points behind eventual champion Pascal Wehrlein before that event and won on his return at the London finale. He is instead focused on fully exploiting his current opportunity, with what he calls a "steady mindset of trying to achieve your goals each weekend".

"I have a very simple way of going about each race," the 32-year-old explains. "I have my own targets and if things are going better, it's a bonus."

Rowland concedes that expectations have changed since the start of last season, internally and externally, from there initially being a "no pressure, we'll just do the best we can sort of mentality". Partly, he reasons, this is because Nissan is more settled operationally: "Last year there was quite a lot of new people in new roles. I feel like this year they are more certain in the job they're doing and have that little bit more experience."

Better preparation is something Rowland also cites as a major factor in his rapid start to the current campaign, the first with the Gen3 Evo incorporating four-wheel drive in qualifying, at race starts and in Attack Mode. Whereas Mahindra's troubled Gen3 test programme meant "the learning slope was extremely high in our first season", Rowland identifies his development work with the Gen3 Evo with hitting the ground running.

Compared to last season, when Rowland says "I was spending a lot of time trying to understand and learn and I wasn't always in the perfect mindset in terms of what I wanted from the car, or when it needed to be delivered", he has been a consistent threat this term. Rowland hasn't scored a pole position this season, but his feat in reaching the semi-final stage of Formula E's duel qualifying format at every race translates into a supergrid average of 2.75. That compares favourably to double polesitter Wehrlein (4.25) and Rowland's closest title challenger Taylor Barnard (10.25), the McLaren rookie also using Nissan powertrains.

Rowland's experience enables him to optimise systems and extract more from the car

GALLOWAY/FORMULA E

FERRARO

STALEY

Nissan is much-changed since Rowland's first stint, though key personnel remain

GALLOWAY/FORMULA E

Rowland leads Formula E standings after wins here in Mexico City and Jeddah

But when asked about what else changed prior to the new campaign, Rowland's response is telling. Above the more powerful car, his change of team-mate (Nato replaced Fenestraz after a single season with Andretti, bringing fresh understanding of Porsche's powertrain) or even an engineer swap (Rowland now works with Fenestraz's engineer from last season, Johann Aime), the biggest difference for the Briton concerns the tyres.

Hankook's latest offering is peakier and degrades more quickly, which Rowland likens to the Michelin from Gen2. The requirement this creates to be "on the limit as quickly as possible", he believes, plays to his strengths in qualifying. Where previously drivers could "get four attempts at a lap with a very similar amount of grip, this year the tyres are performing at a much higher level when they're brand new. In qualifying you have to find the grip on either the first or the second lap and this is definitely something that suits me."

Rowland is among a group of drivers including Guenther and Wehrlein who'll be knocking on the door of 100 Formula E starts by the present campaign's culmination. He's come a long way since his Punta del Este debut in 2015 as a stand-in at Mahindra, which Rowland describes as "a rushed experiment at a time when the championship was relatively new". Now imbued with the experience to lead a team, he credits former team-mates Sebastien Buemi, Alexander Sims and Lucas di Grassi with helping him understand how to get the best out of a car and deliver valuable feedback.

"My pace is very much the same," he reasons. "I think I can probably get more out of the car just through optimisation of systems and having that experience."

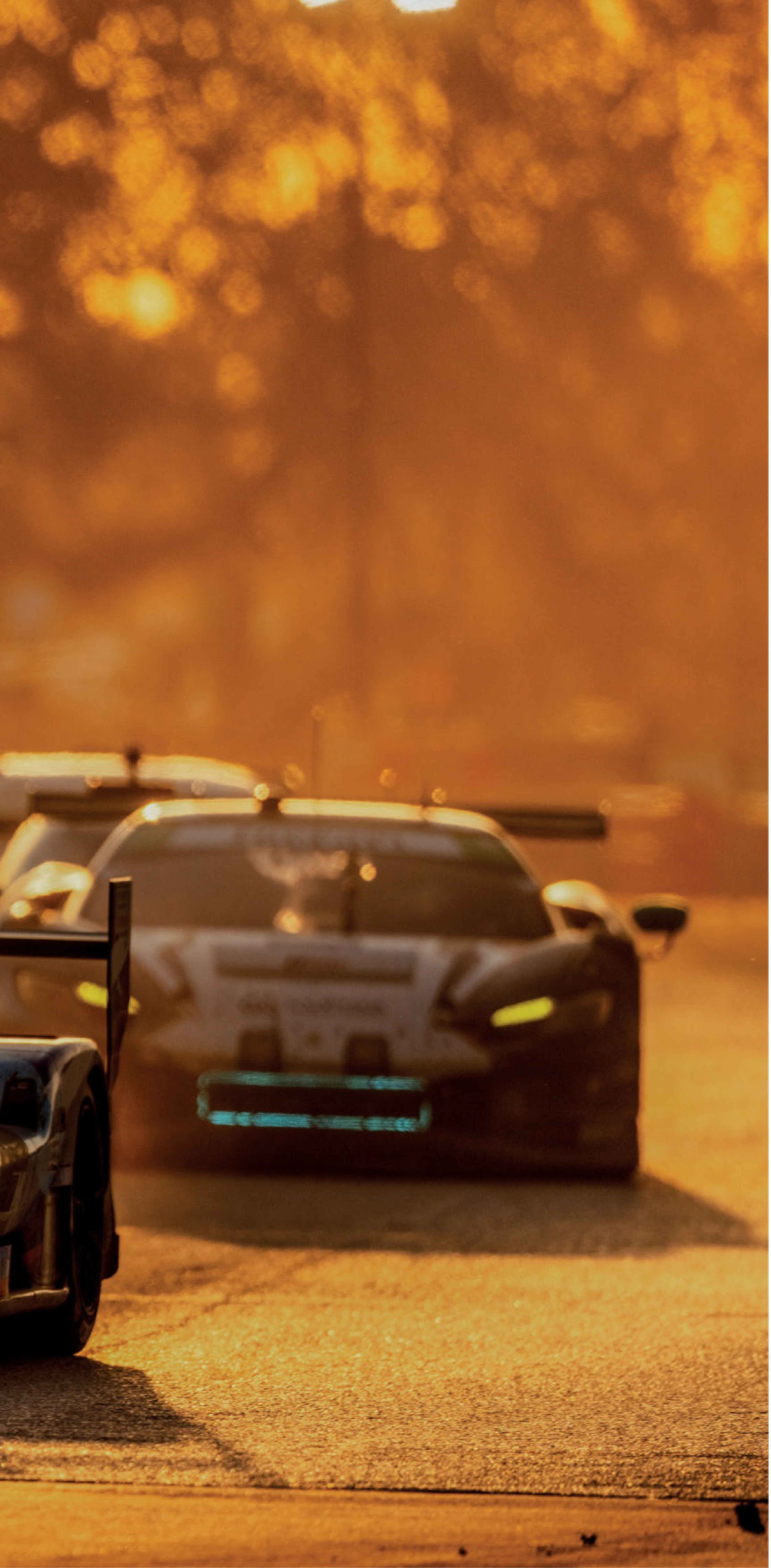
The 2015 Formula Renault 3.5 champion is no stranger to title fights, which will surely be invaluable in the months ahead navigating Formula E's numerous curveballs. The latest of those, Pit Boost, Rowland adapted to seamlessly when it was belatedly introduced last time out in Jeddah.

"I love the challenges of Pit Boost and new strategic stuff," he states. "I love thinking about it and discussing it with the team. From my perspective, these new things are a huge opportunity to do things better than everybody else. I'm enjoying the Pit Boost and different Attack Modes, it really suits my adaptive style and the ability to think outside the box."

The timing of the safety car and his own Attack Mode aided Rowland's victory in Mexico, but a near-perfect Jeddah display culminating in a dominant 5.8-second victory showed Nissan doesn't need luck to win. Rowland says the weekend "was proof that we know what we're doing, proof that we can do it. I don't expect that the whole season is going to be in the way that I can win every single race. I still think people are going to fight back, like Porsche and Jaguar. We still need to firmly keep our feet on the ground and keep working hard."

Rowland notes that Nissan has "still got small weaknesses that we need to work on" but is confident "we're in a really good place", and identifies his team as "probably one of the strongest I've been involved with in my career". That's a notable statement that suggests Rowland should be in the fight for the long haul.

Bavarian Motor Works
IMSA



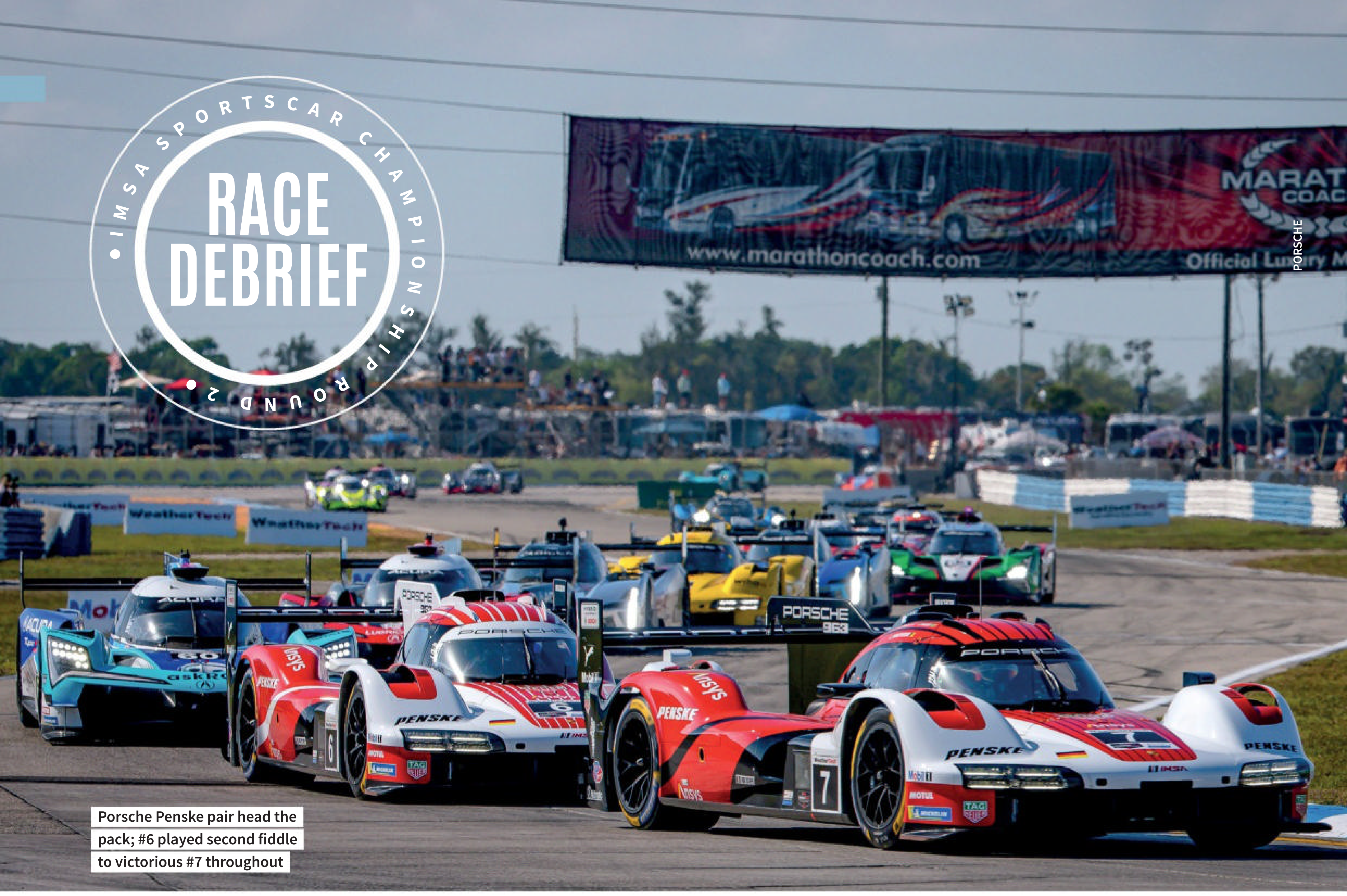
Lights on, full Beemer

The laser-lit 'kidney grille' adorning the #25 BMW M Hybrid V8's nose renders the provenance of this machine unmistakable as the sun sets over the Sebring International Raceway. At last month's 12-hour endurance classic, celebrations for BMW North America's 50th anniversary could be excused for being muted. Dries Vanthoor took pole position in the #24 car shared with Kevin Magnussen and Philipp Eng, but the trio ended up classified 44th following lengthy crash repairs. Sheldon van der Linde, Marco Wittmann and Robin Frijns in #25 at least upheld honours fighting back from 10th on the grid to finish fifth.

Photographer Sam Cobb/BMW

Where Sebring, Florida, USA
When Saturday 15 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R5
EF500mm lens, 1/1000th @ F4.0


Porsche Penske pair head the pack; #6 played second fiddle to victorious #7 throughout

PORSCHE

IMSA

TANDY COMPLETES TRIPLE CROWN TO HEAD PORSCHE 1-2

Nick Tandy, Felipe Nasr and Laurens Vanthoor made it two from two in the 2025 IMSA SportsCar Championship on the middle weekend of March. The factory Porsche Penske Motorsport trio completed the 'Florida 36 Hours' when they added victory at Sebring over 12 hours to their 24-hour triumph at Daytona in January. And with it came another record for Tandy: he joined the select group of drivers to have claimed the unofficial triple crown of endurance by adding an overall Sebring success to those at Le Mans and Daytona.

On the face of it, Sebring looked like a repeat of Daytona: the same PPM Porsche 963 LMDh took the laurels; the team's second car was in the top three (runner-up this time, not third); and a Meyer Shank Acura claimed the other podium spot (#93 this time, not #60). That's not to forget another sublime performance from the Penske squad. "Just like Daytona we didn't get any penalties, have any contacts or any technical problems," said Tandy. "It was another flawless race."

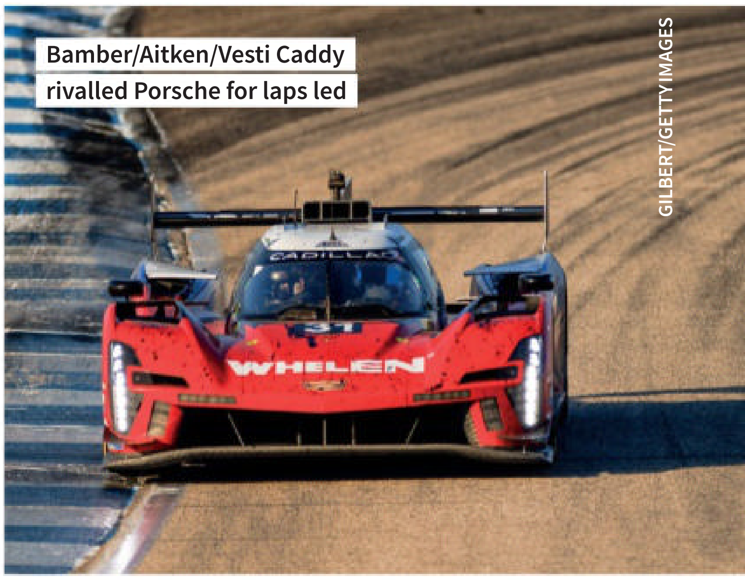
Yet this one was different. The Porsche was the fastest car around the 3.74-mile Sebring International Raceway; nip and tuck with the best of the entries from Cadillac for much of the way, but then with a clear if slight advantage when it mattered in the cooler temperatures after darkness. That wasn't the case at Daytona: BMW, remember, could and arguably should have won the IMSA season-opener.

And this time, the winning #7 factory Porsche had a significant edge over the sister entry shared by Matt Campbell, Mathieu Jaminet and Kevin Estre, a car that didn't lead a lap at Sebring. Seven weeks previously on the high banks of Daytona, #6 was at least its match, only to lose the chance of victory on PPM's strategy split at the final pitstops. It would be churlish to say that it was easy for Tandy, Nasr and Vanthoor, given the gap between the two Porsches at the flag was 2.2 seconds. But there was none of the jeopardy of Daytona, no real threat from the sister car or another manufacturer in the final dash to the line.

When the race went green for the final 32 minutes after the seventh and final safety car, Nasr was able to edge away from Jaminet, who in turn had the measure of Nick Yelloly aboard the #93 Meyer Shank Racing Acura ARX-06 LMDh. Porsche's big challenger for much of the race was no longer in the mix. That car was the Action Express Racing Cadillac V-Series.R LMDh shared by Earl Bamber, Jack Aitken and Frederik Vesti. It led almost as many of the 353 laps as the winning Porsche – 155 versus 166 – but a divergent strategy over the final hours left it fifth in the queue in Bamber's hands at the final restart and ultimately fourth.

Vesti had led out of the pits during the round of pitstop with three hours to go, but subsequently stopped eight minutes before Tandy. The next stop, after Bamber had taken over, was nine minutes earlier. That left it fourth behind the two Porsches and the #25 Rahal BMW M Hybrid V8 LMDh with Marco Wittmann at the wheel prior to the final set of yellows.

That was a mean third, given that the BMW needed a splash of fuel. Action Express opted to bring in Bamber, too, in the hope that with fresh Michelin rubber he might be able to do something about the Porsches. "We'd looked at last year's race and boxed thinking that new tyres was the right


Bamber/Aitken/Vesti Caddy rivalled Porsche for laps led

GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

Vanthoor, Nasr and Tandy enjoy the moment after sublime performance

option and would give us enough of an advantage to come back at the Porsches," explained Bamber. "But we just couldn't make our way through." His problem was that he took nine laps to get past Neel Jani in the privateer Proton Competition Porsche.

What wasn't clear was whether the Action Express car needed fuel at the final yellow. Its previous pitcall had come with an hour and three minutes left on the clock, which would have meant a splash had the race run green through the last hour. It appeared there was some kind of fuel system issue, one yet to be clarified by the team, that resulted in shorter stints than earlier in the race when it had enjoyed a clear energy advantage.

Yet Bamber wasn't convinced that he could have beaten the Porsches. He reckoned any advantage the Caddy enjoyed during the daylight hours disappeared under the cover of darkness: "At night they came alive. The best we could have done on sheer pace was third."

The winning Porsche's dominance was such that it wasn't headed during the final two hours. After Vesti had got ahead of #7 in the pits courtesy of that fuel advantage, the Porsche, now with Tandy at the wheel, came back at him. It was briefly scored ahead 10 laps into the stint, but Tandy couldn't make the move stick. Nine laps later, he threw it down the inside into Turn 17 in the last pass for the lead. "I had a few goes at him," explained Tandy. "Then I got a run in traffic down the back straight. That time, I thought, 'To hell with it, it's time to go!'"

It was fitting that Tandy should make the move that got #7 into the lead for the final time, notwithstanding Nasr's seeing through the job at the end. At Daytona, Tandy became the first driver to win all four of the world's big 24-hour races outright when he added to his respective 2015, 2018 and 2020 triumphs at Le Mans, the Nurburgring and Spa. This time he joined an illustrious list of drivers, Dan Gurney and AJ Foyt included, to have scooped the triple crown.

Tandy was chuffed to win at Sebring: he was already talking about what it would mean in Daytona's aftermath. That made it hard for him to choose between his two achievements of historical significance. "To be part of a select group who have won all three makes me proud – just look at the names who've done it," he smiled. "It holds more history than winning the four 24-hour races, but to be the first person to do something probably gives it something over and above the triple crown."

GARY WATKINS

GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

Final podium place filled by van der Zande/Yellolly/Palou Acura

RESULTS

GTP/OVERALL

1 **Felipe Nasr/Nick Tandy/Laurens Vanthoor**
Porsche Penske Motorsport
Porsche 963
353 laps in 12h01m23.265s
Grid 3rd (1m47.522s)

2 **Mathieu Jaminet/Matt Campbell/Kevin Estre**
Porsche Penske Motorsport
Porsche 963
+2.239s
Grid 4th (1m47.598s)

3 **Renger van der Zande/Nick Yelloly/Alex Palou**
Meyer Shank Racing
Acura ARX-06
+5.017s
Grid 6th (1m48.108s)

4 **Jack Aitken/Earl Bamber/Frederik Vesti**
Action Express Racing
Cadillac V-Series.R
+12.661s
Grid 13th (no time)

5 **Marco Wittmann/Sheldon van der Linde/Robin Frijns**
BMW M Team RLL
BMW M Hybrid V8
+19.257s
Grid 10th (1m48.780s)

LMP2

1 **Tom Dillmann/Bijoy Garg/Jeremy Clarke**
Inter Europol Competition
ORECA-Gibson 07
347 laps in 12h02m10.859s
Grid 10th (1m53.769s)

GTD PRO

1 **Klaus Bachler/Laurin Heinrich/Alessio Picariello**
AO Racing
Porsche 911 GT3-R
329 laps in 12h02m47.802s
Grid 2nd (1m59.397s)

GTD

1 **Philip Ellis/Russell Ward/Indy Dontje**
Winward Racing
Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo
327 laps in 12h03m09.232s
Grid 4th (1m59.684s)

Pole **Dries Vanthoor** (BMW M Hybrid V8) 1m47.091s (125.72mph)

Fastest lap **Nasr** 1m49.120s (123.39mph)

LE MANS 24 HOURS

PORSCHE PUTS WEHRLEIN IN WITH TANDY

Reigning Formula E world champion Pascal Wehrlein has taken the vacant spot in the third Porsche Penske Motorsport entry for the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The German will make his debut at the French enduro on 14-15 June in the #4 Porsche 963 alongside Nick Tandy and Felipe Nasr. Wehrlein got the nod for the additional car being fielded by PPM alongside its two regular World Endurance Championship entries after racing one of the LMDh prototypes for the first time with the JDC-Miller MotorSports customer team at the Daytona 24 Hours this January, taking sixth position.

GARY WATKINS

P93 OPINION

PORSCHE

Lotterer (left) claimed Hypercar WEC title in 2024 with Estre and Vanthoor

GIBSON/PORSCHE

LE MANS 24 HOURS

WEC CHAMP LOTTERER REPLACES SARGEANT IN 'GENESIS' P2

Andre Lotterer will be back at the Le Mans 24 Hours ahead of schedule this June. The three-time winner of the race will make his 14th start at the World Endurance Championship blue riband a year early at the wheel of an LMP2 ORECA.

The German has been brought in to share the IDEC Sport ORECA-Gibson 07, run as part of the so-called trajectory programme of South Korean manufacturer Genesis ahead of its entry into WEC's Hypercar division in 2026. Former Audi and Porsche driver Lotterer, who signed as a race and development driver for Hyundai's prestige marque last year, comes into the line-up after ex-Formula 1 driver Logan Sargeant, who had been due to drive the car, stepped back from racing.

Lotterer will share with Jamie Chadwick and Mathys Jaubert at Le Mans. Sargeant's place in the European Le Mans Series – which kicked off at Barcelona at the start of April – alongside the same two drivers will be taken by Chevrolet GT racer Daniel Juncadella.

GARY WATKINS

Vermeulen is already a regular in EFR Ferrari

SRO/JEP

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

VERSTAPPEN'S ESPORTS PROTEGE LULHAM GETS TWIN-PRONGED GT PROGRAMME

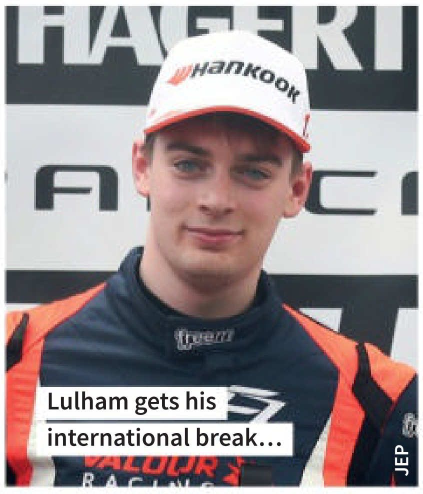
Max Verstappen has put his weight behind one of his Esports proteges. Chris Lulham, a stalwart of the four-time Formula 1 world champion's Team Redline virtual squad, is being given a full season of international racing in the real world in 2025.

The 22-year-old Briton will contest the GT World Challenge Europe under the Verstappen.com Racing banner – in two different cars. Lulham will line up in an Emil Frey Racing Ferrari 296 GT3 in the Sprint Cup events, and an Aston Martin Vantage GT3 fielded by 2 Seas Motorsport in the Endurance Cup, which includes the Spa 24 Hours at the end of June.

Lulham makes the move up to the GTWCE in what will be only his second full season of racing. He dominated the pro class of Radical SR3 UK Cup with the Valour Racing team last year, having only completed one weekend of car racing, in the British Formula 4 Championship back in 2019.

The announcement from Verstappen.com Racing stated that Lulham had been "handpicked" to make what it called a "significant step" after successes in the virtual realm that include winning the 24-hour races at Le Mans and the Nurburgring.

"It has always been my dream to support young drivers and for a while now, I have been trying to create the possibility for a sim driver to progress to real world racing," said Verstappen, who was part of the winning line-up for the Nurburgring iRacing round last year. "With Chris Lulham, now being promoted from Team Redline sim, we take it to the next step."


Lulham gets his international break...

JEP

...while King joins for Endurance rounds

PORSCHE

The graduation is an "exciting prospect", said Lulham. "We already had a very thorough and busy off-season preparing for what is coming. It's an unbelievable chance and I can't wait to make the most out of this opportunity."

Lulham will share the Ferrari with another Verstappen protege, Thierry Vermeulen. The son of his manager, Raymond, will also be racing with the Swiss team for a second year in the DTM. Porsche Supercup frontrunner Harry King will then join them in the Aston for the enduros.

Verstappen's increased involvement in GT3 racing for this year could be the next step towards becoming a team owner, a desire he outlined last summer. He tested the 2 Seas Aston at Paul Ricard over the winter as part of the preparations for 2025.

GARY WATKINS

COBB/BMW

IMSA ENDURO SWAP

Next year's IMSA SportsCar schedule has a familiar look. There's just one change: the Road America round in August becomes a six-hour event and joins the Endurance Cup segment of the series. It replaces the 'Battle of the Bricks' at Indianapolis, which becomes a regular sprint race.

The move could open the door for a World Endurance round at the Brickyard. Track owner Roger Penske has made no secret of his desire to host the series.

GARY WATKINS

FOTOSPEEDY

ELITE'S GT3 FERRARI

After winning the GT4 European Series title together last year, Elite Motorsport and Tom Lebbon are stepping up to GT3 this season in International GT Open. Lebbon will be partnered by fellow Elite GT4 McLaren graduate Tom Emson at the wheel of a Ferrari 296 GT3.

"Taking two of our long-standing Elite drivers from Ginetta Junior all the way into International GT3 racing shows the progression I've always wanted," said team boss Eddie Ives.

97 BEECHDEAN Motorsport
SUNOCO

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INSIDER

Porsche's final Le Mans choice is intriguing, reckons Gary Watkins

Seasoned hands at the Le Mans 24 Hours like me are fond of a historical precedent. And so too, it seems, is Porsche. It has decided to bring in Pascal Wehrlein from its Formula E squad for the World Endurance Championship blue riband in June to give the reigning FE title holder the chance to win the race on his debut with a seat in the third factory 963 LMDh. Debutants, big names and otherwise, have done rather well for the German manufacturer over the years.

Most recently, of course, it recruited Nico Hulkenberg from Formula 1 to drive the extra works 919 Hybrid LMP1 at Le Mans in 2015. The German, racing with Force India at the time, helped deliver Porsche its first outright win at the big race for nearly 20 years together with Nick Tandy and Earl Bamber. Hulkenberg was the star signing for the car, but Bamber was also making his first start at the French enduro. Often forgotten, that.

Scroll back to Porsche's previous win in 1998 with the 911 GT1-98, and it recruited Laurent Aiello to drive alongside Allan McNish and Stephane Ortelli on a reshuffle of its line-up after Yannick Dalmas broke his arm when he slipped on some water in a supermarket car park. "A freak shopping accident" is how I cheekily described it, tipping my hat to *This is Spinal Tap*, the comedy rock mockumentary. Aiello at the time was well on the way to becoming arguably the greatest tin-top driver of all time, but remained a rank sportscar rookie.

Two years before, Alex Wurz had driven the winning Porsche WSC95. He wasn't a Porsche signing, rather Joest Racing brought him in from its Opel International Touring Car squad to drive what was a works-backed car. The following year a certain Tom Kristensen made a winning debut in the same machine, now without factory support, at a few days' notice. A Le Mans rookie he might have been, but he wasn't racing a sportscar for the first time like Wurz and Aiello.

I've always believed that if you can drive, you can drive. Racing cars, with one or two notable exceptions, have four wheels that sit on the track and one more that the driver hangs onto. Wehrlein may well excel alongside Tandy and Felipe Nasr, but there's a chance he may not.

Priority number one for the 963 programme this year is a 20th outright Le Mans victory for Porsche. It has made that crystal clear. The third car, it has always insisted, shouldn't be regarded as that. Rather it wants it to be one of three, all with an equal chance of victory.

Last year, Josef Newgarden played a part in Porsche Penske Motorsport's Daytona 24 Hours victory – a bit part because he spent limited time in the car during the race. Roger Penske was pretty blunt when asked if his IndyCar megastar was a contender for Le Mans: he wasn't running a "driving school", he insisted.

That comment 12 months ago begs a question today: why did Porsche pass up the opportunity to fill the vacant berth in the #4 PPM entry with one of the drivers with extensive Le Mans and sportscar experience on its roster? It would be easy to suggest that it has chosen the wrong man from FE to fill the vacancy created when it slimmed down its full-time WEC roster from six to four drivers. (With two of its four IMSA pilots, Matt Campbell and Mathieu Jaminet, already slated to drive the regular WEC cars at the double-points round, it only had two left for the additional entry.)

Antonio Felix da Costa is Wehrlein's team-mate in the factory Porsche FE squad and has proven credentials at Le Mans. The Portuguese has contested the race six times and was a class winner in LMP2 with Jota back in 2022 (and second in 2020), and has also raced a 963 at the 24 Hours for the British team.

Maybe to have brought in da Costa would have represented a loss of face for Porsche. It barred him from racing in the WEC, Le Mans included, last year so he could focus on his FE campaign.

> ***"Priority number one for the 963 programme this year is a 20th outright victory for Porsche"***

The other Porsche-contracted FE man is Nico Muller, who has been farmed out to Andretti this season. The former Peugeot driver doesn't have da Costa's experience at Le Mans – just the three starts – but he knows about sportscar racing. During his eight-year stint with Audi he raced its GT machinery regularly.

That's something Wehrlein hasn't done with Porsche, or for Mercedes during his years on its books. Right now he has one sportscar race under his belt: an outing at Daytona this year when he drove the JDC-Miller team's 963.

His debut comes at a time when Le Mans and the WEC is more competitive than ever, and also the rules concerning safety cars and the like more intricate than in the past. That means I can't help wondering whether Porsche has made the wrong call on this one. But if Wehrlein wins with Tandy and Nasr, it will be a great story.

ASTON'S BET ON GAMBLE

An early decision to switch to a career in sportscars set Tom Gamble on the path to a dream opportunity in Aston Martin's Valkyrie Hypercar line-up. And the 23-year-old Briton has a special reason to relish the chance to target outright glory at Le Mans

GARY WATKINS

Oliver Gavin, five class wins at the Le Mans 24 Hours, Darren Turner three and Oliver Jarvis two. The record of Autosport BRDC Young Driver Award winners at the French enduro is quite phenomenal – 14 category victories in just over 20 years. There has, however, been no overall triumph; just a series of near-misses. The latest Award alumnus to graduate to the top class at Le Mans is aiming to put that right. And he has time on his side.

Tom Gamble, who claimed the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, has joined Aston Martin for its entry into the World Endurance Championship's Hypercar class with the Valkyrie and The Heart of Racing squad at the age of just 23. His story is quite different to the likes of Anthony Davidson, Jarvis and Jamie Davies, the Award winners to grace the overall podium at the 24 Hours. Davidson made it to Formula 1, while the single-seater careers of Jarvis and Davies continued in the years after they celebrated their success with Autosport on the stage at the Grosvenor House Hotel. Gamble hasn't raced a single-seater since his moment in the sun in London.

Gamble switched to sportscars in year two of his professional career, after a solitary and far from unsuccessful season in the BRDC Formula 3 Championship (now GB3). The promise shown that year with Fortec Motorsport gained him his Award nomination. His journey to becoming a factory Aston Martin driver with a WEC seat in the Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercar has taken him through a multitude of series and categories around the world, moving from a jobbing silver-rated driver into the works ranks with McLaren and now on to Aston.

The ambition to get to the point where he could challenge for an outright Le Mans victory was there from the start, and crystallised when he moved into the prototype ranks, first in LMP3 and then P2 in his second and third years of sportscar racing in 2020 and 2021. Those were the years of a stream of announcements from manufacturers that they would be building machinery to race in the WEC's Hypercar class and GTP in the IMSA SportsCar Championship in North America.

"As soon as I went into sportscar racing in 2019, the goal was to get to the top class at Le Mans and fight to win that overall with a manufacturer," states Gamble. "When all the manufacturers started showing interest in Hypercar, I think every sportscar driver's goal was to get there."

Gamble put himself in the frame during the formative years of a sportscar career that kicked off in 2019 with a campaign in the GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup with the WRT Audi squad. He won the European Le Mans Series LMP3 crown the following year driving for United Autosports, and finished second overall on his graduation to LMP2 with the Anglo-American team the following year.

The 2022 season, one in which an inevitable upgrade to gold status occurred, was key in the Gamble journey: he raced for the THOR Aston squad for the first time, competing »

THE HEART OF RACING
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AMR
THE HEART OF RACING

Gamble set his goal to be a works driver fighting for outright victory at Le Mans

LENSSEN PHOTO/ASTON MARTIN

YOUNG DRIVER AWARD WINNERS AT LE MANS

THE CLASS WINNERS

Oliver Gavin – 1991
2002, 2004-06 GTS/GT1, 2015 GTE Pro (Corvette Racing)

Jamie Davies – 1994
2003 GTS (Veloqx/Prodrive)

Darren Turner - 1996
2007-08 GT1, 2017 GTE Pro (Aston Martin Racing)

Jonny Kane – 1995
2010 LMP2 (Strakka)

Oliver Turvey – 2006
2014 LMP2 (Jota)

Oliver Jarvis – 2005
2017 LMP2 (Jackie Chan/Jota) & 2024 LMP2 (United Autosports)

Paul di Resta – 2004
2020 LMP2 (United)

THE OUTRIGHT PODIUMS

Jamie Davies – 1994
2004 2nd (Veloqx Audi)

Anthony Davidson – 2000
2013 2nd, 2014 3rd (Toyota)

Oliver Jarvis – 2005
2012 3rd, 2013 3rd, 2016 3rd (Audi), 2017 2nd (Jackie Chan/Jota)

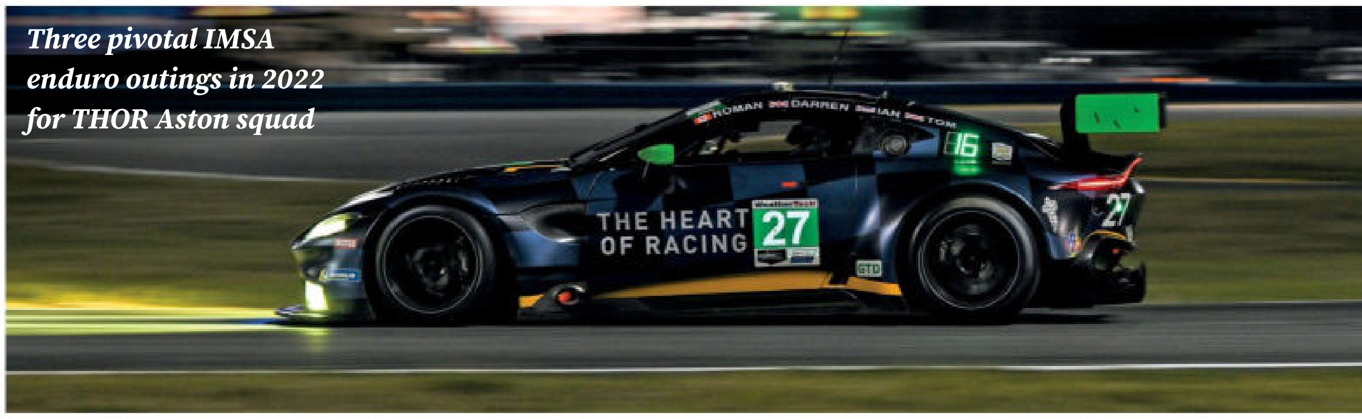
Impressive Ligier run (right) helped scoop Young Driver F1 prize test

STALEY/GETTY IMAGES

STALEY/GETTY IMAGES

On his way to European Le Mans Series LMP3 crown in 2020 with United Autosports

GETTY IMAGES


Three pivotal IMSA enduro outings in 2022 for THOR Aston squad

GAVIN BAKER/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

Gamble concedes Hypercar effort is playing catch-up and victory at Le Mans this year is unrealistic

NOUSHAD THEKKAYIL/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

in three of the IMSA enduros with the Aston Martin Vantage GT3, and successfully tried out for a factory deal with McLaren at the end of the year.

"Racing for THOR was my first role as a gold, so it was definitely important in my career," reckons Gamble, who raced in the regular GT Daytona pro-am division at the Daytona 24 Hours and Sebring 12 Hours, and then moved into THOR's GTD Pro entry for the Petit Le Mans IMSA finale at Road Atlanta.

Landing a McLaren works role for 2023 was also significant. Having a seat with a manufacturer changes perceptions of a driver, Gamble says. He was given a try-out in a 720S GT3 Evo on "a freezing cold December day at Snetterton". An invitation to join its factory roster quickly followed, along with a first race outing in a 720S on the opening weekend of the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai the following February. The deal, however, wouldn't be announced until March.

"It was another step for me," explains Gamble. "The 2023 season was a bit tricky because I didn't have a full-time race programme, though I was doing a lot of testing. The following year I was doing GTWCE – Endurance and Sprint – and the British GT Championship [with Garage 59 and Optimum respectively]. I did the Asian LMS and Daytona as well. I was pretty much in the car every weekend and that allows you to jump in and show your pace straight away. That was, I think, a big year for me. I learned a lot about being a factory driver and what the role beholds."

> "IT PUT MY NAME OUT THERE. YEARS LIKE THAT ARE CHARACTER BUILDING"

Gamble admits that he has two fellow drivers to thank for his introductions to THOR and McLaren. Ross Gunn, who is joining him and Harry Tincknell in the #007 Valkyrie at Le Mans and selected WEC rounds, put his name forward to THOR team principal Ian James, while Ben Barnicoat did likewise with McLaren when he moved on from its books to race for Lexus in IMSA.

"Ben, who is a good friend, was moving on and said, 'I think this guy would be a good fit for you', and it kind of went from there," recalls Gamble. "Ross was the one who introduced me to Ian, and now we've ended up together in the Valkyrie. I've got a lot to thank a couple of my fellow competitors for."

And James at THOR. Gamble explains that he always kept in touch with the expat Brit after he landed his McLaren gig: "We got on well and when the Valkyrie programme was announced [in October 2023] I dropped him a little message saying congratulations."

What Gamble didn't do is lobby for a go in the Valkyrie as it was undergoing its development phase over the second half of last year: "I think he might have told me where to go; I thought I'd let him do any calling."

When the call came to test the Valkyrie at Jerez in Spain at the end of last year it was "a pinch yourself moment", says Gamble. "Suddenly I realised that the opportunity I'd been dreaming of was possibly on my doorstep. It was a big moment."

James and THOR have always looked to foster young talent. Gamble's place in the Valkyrie line-up, along with that of Roman De Angelis in the IMSA car, is a manifestation of that. "Ian always took an interest in what I was doing and believed in me," continues Gamble, who is also lining up in non-clashing IMSA rounds at the wheel of a Vantage evo in GTD. "Having raced for him, as well as getting the experience of racing prototypes and working with a manufacturer in McLaren, he obviously thought I would be a good fit. My job now is to justify his faith in me."

Gamble has attained the holy grail of racing for a manufacturer at the top of the sportscar tree at a much younger age than the likes of Davidson, Davies and Jarvis. He has no regrets about abandoning his single-seater aspirations within months of his 17th birthday. He does admit that he expected the "phone to be ringing off the hook" on the day after he won the Award. But he concedes that was probably unrealistic: even as he was starting out in single-seaters after racing for two seasons in Ginetta Juniors, he understood the chances of realising the ambition to become an F1 driver were slim.

Gamble had an impressive first – and last – season on the ladder in BRDC F3. As a 16-year-old, he finished fifth in the points behind four drivers all with multiple years in single-seaters under their belts. The Brit, however, admits that he wasn't entirely content with his campaign.

"I actually made a few cock-ups, was a bit ambitious with a few moves, which undoubtedly cost me some positions in the championship," he recalls. "I was actually quite disappointed with myself. But my main objective for that season was to be nominated for the Autosport Award, so to win that was a huge thing."

There's no sorrow on Gamble's part that he wasn't able to progress in single-seaters. There wasn't the money to make the hoped step up to Formula Renault Eurocup, which explains the late deal to race for WRT in a Sprint-only GTWCE campaign in the Silver Cup class.

"The results weren't great, but doing that year in GTWCE had its benefits," points out Gamble. "It put my name out there in the sportscar world. Years like that are character building. Everything happens for a reason, right?

"I have no regrets, because you see so many drivers spending a lot of money to get all the way up to Formula 2 and not getting the opportunity to move into F1, and then making the move into sportscars," he explains. "The question is how much better off are you doing that than making the switch earlier?"

Gamble concedes that he probably wouldn't be where he is today, with a factory Hypercar deal in his pocket, had he persisted in single-seaters after winning the Award. He has big aspirations now that he's racing for a manufacturer at the sharp end of the WEC grid, though he's aware that a Le Mans win this year is unrealistic.

"We know we are playing catch-up, but the car has shown some good pace and got through the 12 Hours at Sebring – it was faultless there," he says. "I have confidence that Aston Martin and the team can keep taking steps forward and that we can be challenging for podiums before we know it."

An outright victory at Le Mans remains the big aspiration for Gamble, to finally chalk one up for a winner of an accolade now known as the Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award. Of the lack of a winner at the 24 Hours so far, he reckons, "that's something I need to put right".

KENYA
8
HYUNDAI MOBIS

Tanak flies high for Hyundai

Ott Tanak takes flight over the famous Kedong jump en route to winning stage six as the Estonian builds up an early lead over eventual winner Elfyn Evans on the Safari Rally. While a driveshaft failure ultimately ended his victory bid, Tanak's run to second, with Hyundai team-mate Thierry Neuville finishing third, was Hyundai's best result in Kenya. The South Korean marque managed to turn the tables over Safari king Toyota, scoring 50 points, as Toyota's lead in the manufacturers' championship was whittled down to 26.

Photographer Colin McMaster/ McKlein

Where Kedong, Kenya
When Friday 21 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
RF14-35mm lens, 1/2500th @ F9

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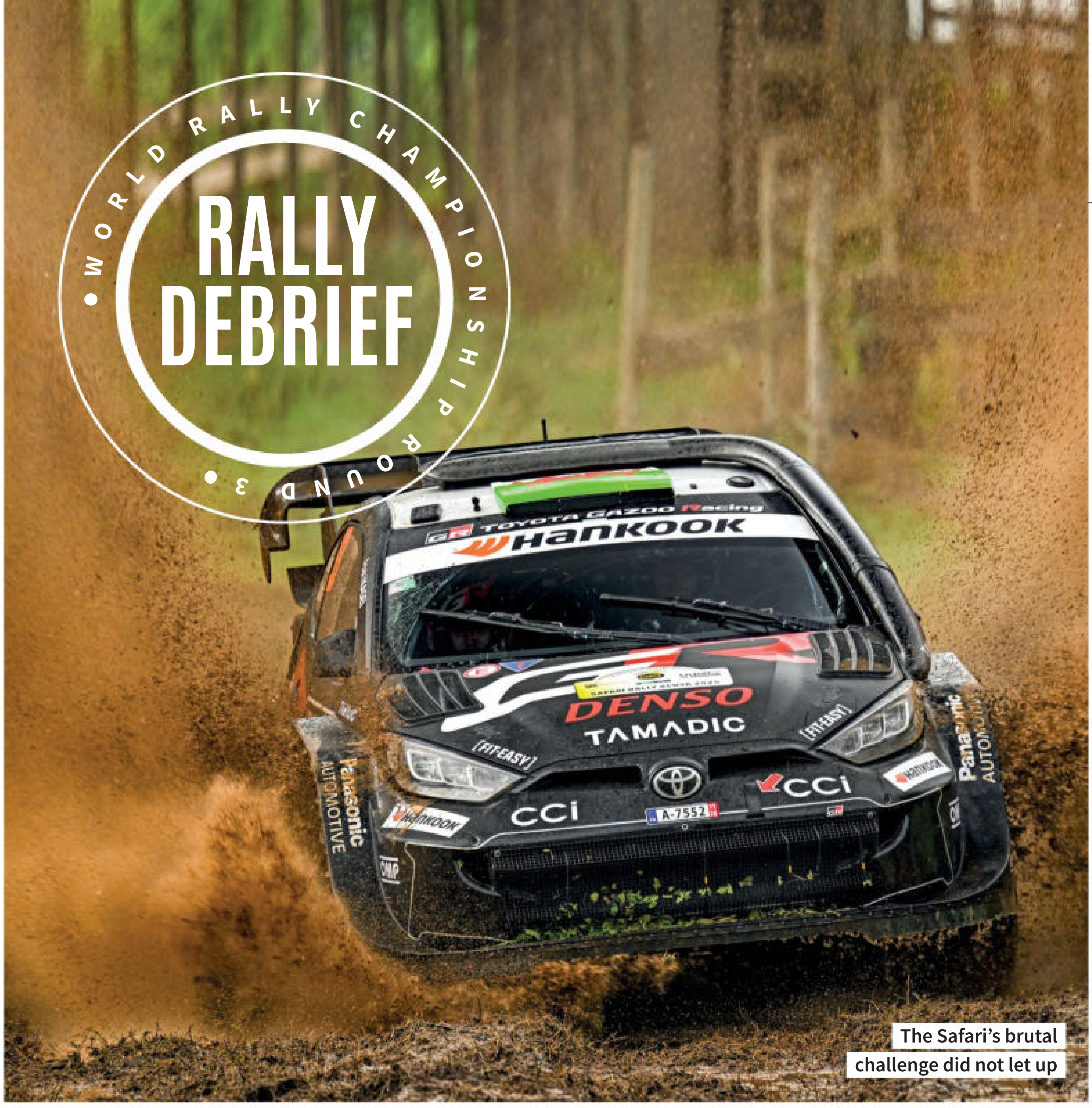
WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 3

RALLY DEBRIEF



The Safari's brutal challenge did not let up

McKLEIN

SAFARI RALLY KENYA RESULTS

1 **Elfyn Evans/**
Scott Martin
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
4h20m03.8s

2 **Ott Tanak/**
Martin Jarveoja
Hyundai Motorsport
Hyundai i20 N Rally1
+1m09.9s

3 **Thierry Neuville/**
Martijn Wydaeghe
Hyundai Motorsport
Hyundai i20 N Rally1
+3m32.0s

POINTS 1 **Evans** 88;
2 Neuville 52; 3 Tanak 49.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

EVANS MAKES MORE HISTORY TO BUILD EARLY ADVANTAGE

Elfyn Evans is now a member of an exclusive club of three, after joining Colin McRae and Richard Burns as British winners of the World Rally Championship's toughest event: Safari Rally Kenya. The Toyota of Evans and co-driver Scott Martin emerged from a gruelling 21-stage rally of attrition with victory by 1m09.9s from Ott Tanak's Hyundai. Evans's victory was the first for a British driver at the Safari since Colin McRae in 2002.

This year's extended 240-mile edition provided a blend of brutal car-breaking roads and wild weather, testing drivers and machines to the limit. Evans was the only Rally1 driver to avoid a major mechanical issue.

No major car issues for Evans and Martin

McKLEIN

The Welshman won Thursday's superspecial stage in Kenyan capital Nairobi but dropped to fifth after stage two. He quickly shot up the leaderboard to sit second, 24.4s behind Tanak, who dominated Friday morning by winning three of the four stages.

The lead changed on stage nine when Tanak's i20 N suffered a driveshaft failure that promoted Evans to the lead. The Yaris was never headed thereafter, despite suffering two punctures and a couple of spins when torrential rain created some of the worst conditions in the event's history on Saturday.

There was then a brief scare on Sunday morning when Evans's Toyota developed an issue that was fixed on a road section. Evans opted not to attack for Super Sunday and Power Stage points but still left the event with 27 points to move into a 36-point lead over Neuville – the biggest margin at the top of the table after three rounds in WRC history.

Tanak's driveshaft issue initially dropped the 2019 world champion to third, 55.4s from the lead as Kalle Rovanpera climbed to second, his Toyota 7.7s behind Evans. However, Rovanpera's rally began to unravel on Saturday morning when he picked up two punctures, the second caused by hitting a rock while avoiding a herd of zebras.

Another collision with a rock in the waterlogged stage 14 damaged his Toyota's left-rear suspension, prompting a makeshift repair using ratchet straps. The Finn dropped more than six minutes nursing his car back to service in fifth position. Rovanpera's hope of securing vital championship points were quashed on Sunday when an alternator issue forced him into retirement.

Rovanpera's exit helped Tanak recover to second despite battling a misting windscreen and a puncture on Saturday, before going on to follow Evans home.

Neuville inherited third after a chaotic start to the rally that began with a 20s loss to a driveshaft issue on stage two. Hyundai changed the transmission as a precaution, which meant Neuville was late arriving to stage three and incurred a one-minute penalty. A jumped start in stage five, followed by a late check-in to stage eight due to a cooling issue, meant Neuville accumulated a total of two minutes of penalties. The Belgian, who was also battling illness, was not immune to punctures but was able to survive a wild Saturday and Sunday's final stages to claim third.

Sami Pajari inherited fourth for Toyota after team-mate Takamoto Katsuta rolled on the final stage and could not reach the last time control. Resilient M-Sport pair Gregoire Munster and Josh McErlean recovered from mechanical issues to their Fords to finish sixth and 10th respectively.

Adrien Fourmaux salvaged the maximum 10 Super Sunday points after an electrical issue forced the Hyundai driver to retire on Thursday, which was followed by broken suspension that ruled him out of Friday.

TOM HOWARD

GRAND PRIX GUIDE

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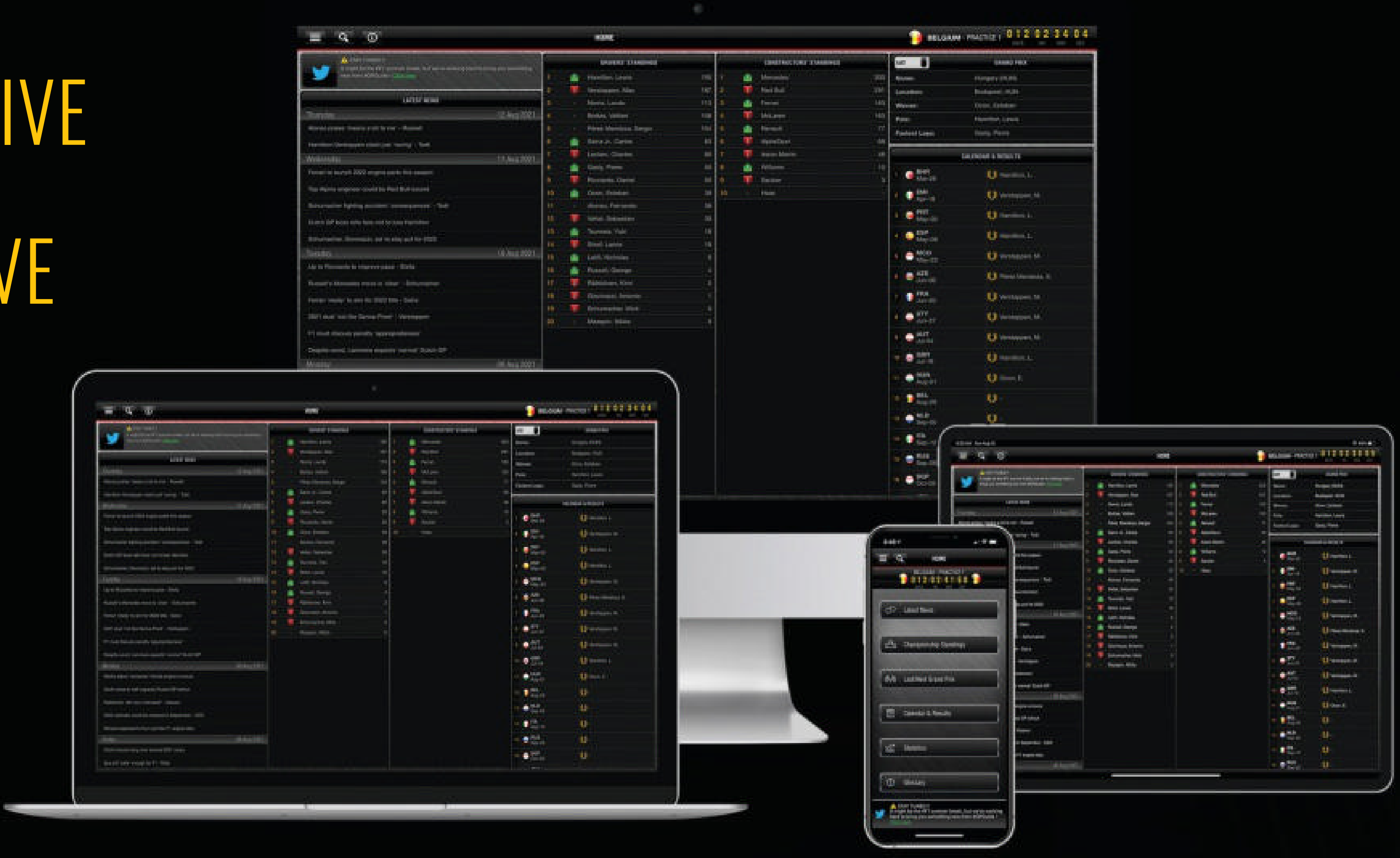

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INSIDER

WRC drivers' silence and solidarity spoke volumes, reckons Tom Howard

There was something noticeably different at Safari Rally Kenya. Instead of the usual insights and explosions of emotion from drivers that enthusiasts have come to love at stage ends, there was silence. It was a silence that was deafening, and one that sent an important message to the FIA as World Rally Championship drivers made their feelings known about the governing body's recent sanctions issued to drivers for using 'inappropriate language'.

Drivers and co-drivers presented a united front in Kenya after the FIA's decision to issue Hyundai Motorsport new boy Adrien Fourmaux a €10,000 fine for swearing during an interview at the end of Rally Sweden in February. In response, they formed the World Rally Drivers' Alliance (WoRDA), similar to Formula 1's Grand Prix Drivers' Association.

A strongly worded statement opposing the fine was issued on 24 February. WoRDA also asked for dialogue with the FIA to find a solution to a situation they declared "unacceptable", given the unique circumstances where rally drivers are expected to speak to television crews seconds after finishing a stage, when emotions often run high.

After failing to receive any communication in the intervening weeks from the FIA until an email minutes before the start of shakedown in Kenya, drivers had already decided to make their point by remaining silent or only speaking in their mother tongue at stage-end interviews throughout the event. They chose to continue to speak with media, but only in dedicated media zones. At the end of the Power Stage, they offered words focused on their event, teams and the fans. The solidarity among the drivers and co-drivers was powerful and it received huge support from the rally community.

WoRDA has been clear that it understands the FIA's stance that drivers are role models, but is asking for some common sense to be applied when it comes to stage-end interviews. "This is not a protest," said WoRDA spokesman and eight-time WRC co-driver champion Julien Ingrassia following the rally. "If we let this situation carry on it will bring more bad consequences for the WRC on the promotion side than the few bad words themselves. It could look like this is a political speech but this is not the case. When WoRDA says it is searching for solutions for the sport, this is 100% true. We are not fighting against anyone or any entity. This is not to create a position of strength or force or anything. This voice is there to once again make this sport better and stronger."

The stage-end interview is an aspect unique to rallying. It is key to the storytelling of an event as an opportunity to engage and connect with drivers, who are offering a window into their raw emotions. "I think this silence was actually a way to be louder and to be heard by the whole community about the fact that WRC without driver comments doesn't have the same feeling or emotion," summed up Hyundai team principal Cyril Abiteboul.

WoRDA achieved one of its objectives, with the FIA agreeing to open dialogue with the teams. Initially, the governing body wanted to hold a meeting at the next round of the championship in the Canary Islands at the end of April, but it has been convinced by WoRDA to move that forward.

"At least we showed that we have a driver alliance now and we are sticking together," opined reigning world champion Thierry Neuville. "We also have a voice and we used the opportunity to show that it is important that we create some dialogue with the FIA, which wasn't the case before. It seems like there will be some more exchanges now and until the next event, which is actually what we had hoped for before Kenya.

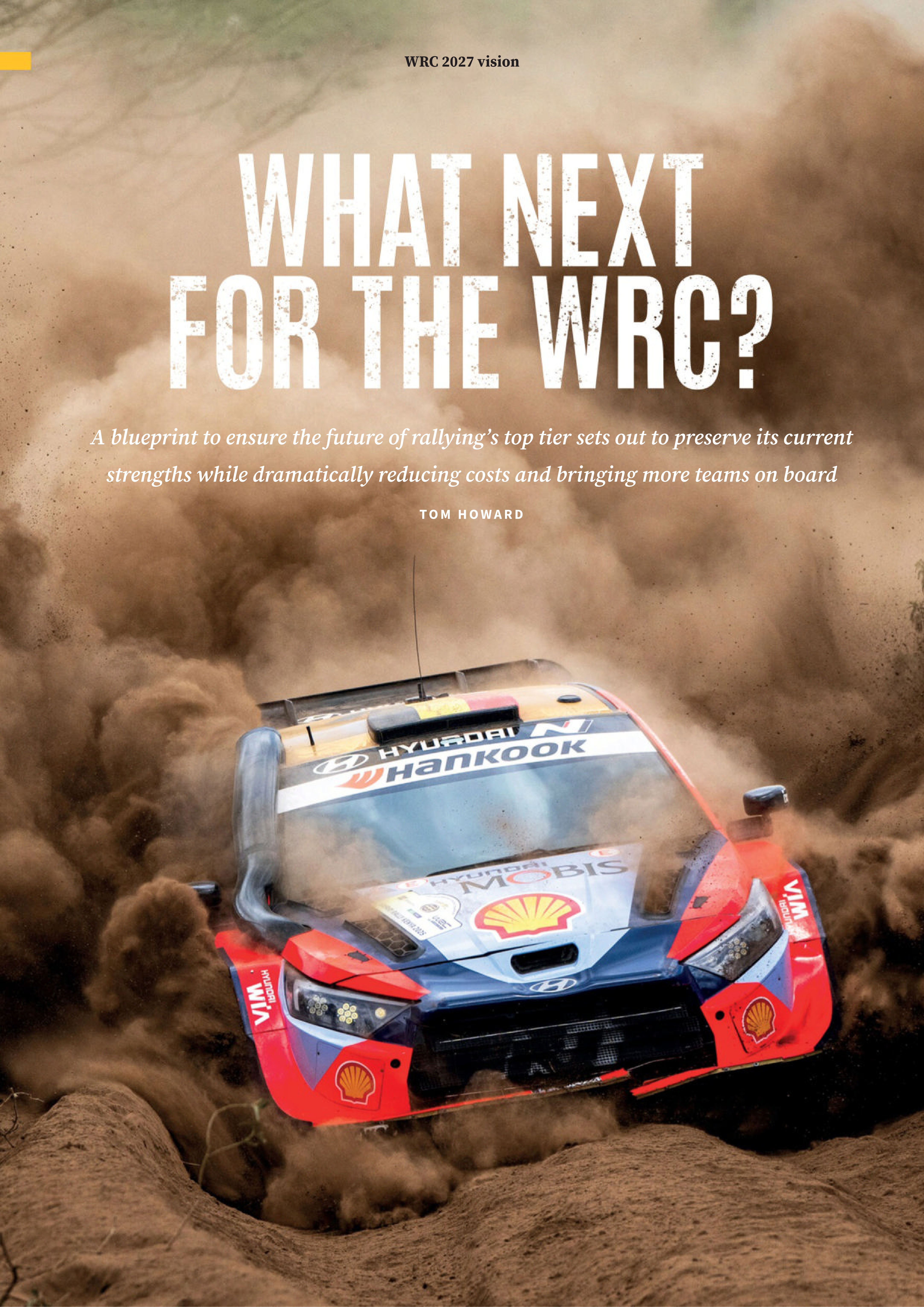
"Of course, we are sorry for the spectators but we had so much support, which was great to see and people were standing behind us and supporting our decision."

An FIA statement issued to Autosport after the Safari Rally shakedown, confirming its decision to open dialogue on the matter, stated that it recognises "it is crucial to assess situations on a case-by-case-basis" but maintains that "unnecessary profanity" from drivers "should not be condoned".

> ***"If we let this situation carry on it will bring more bad consequences for the WRC"***

Interestingly, in F1, Autosport understands that the FIA clarified to drivers at the Australian Grand Prix that it will tolerate strong language, used over team radio, in the heat of the moment – as long as it is not offensive to others, including race officials or fellow competitors. If such language is used during interviews, such as in the TV pen, press conferences or written media sessions, it will be considered a breach of the regulations and reported to the stewards. If heat-of-the-moment comments over team radio will be tolerated in F1, it offers hope that this approach could be adopted for stage-end interviews in WRC.

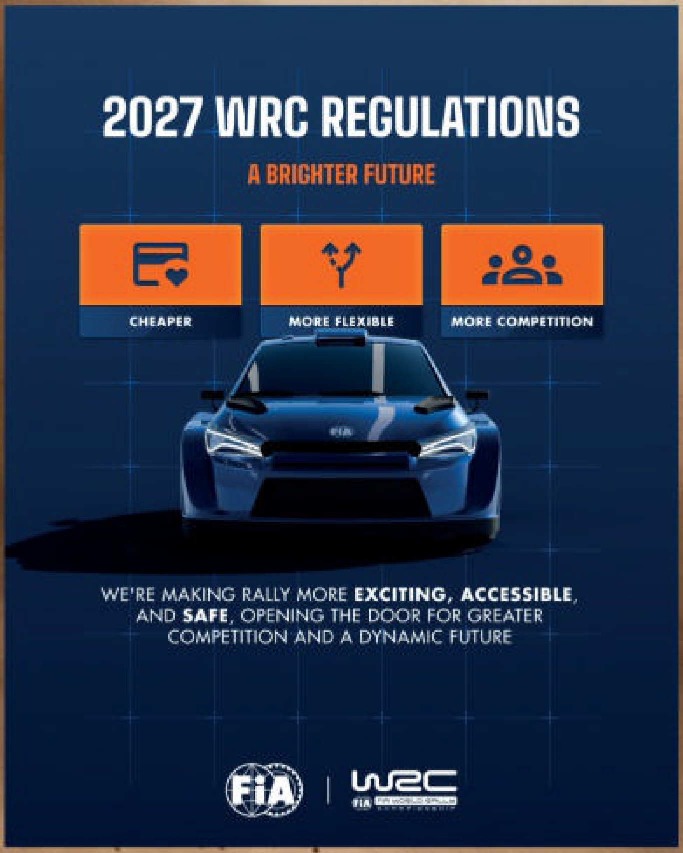
This writer hopes that in the Canary Islands drivers feel comfortable to tell their stories and express their emotions without fear of sanctions.


HYUNDAI N
HANKOOK
HYUNDAI MOBIS
WIA HYUNDAI

WHAT NEXT FOR THE WRC?

A blueprint to ensure the future of rallying's top tier sets out to preserve its current strengths while dramatically reducing costs and bringing more teams on board

TOM HOWARD



2027 WRC REGULATIONS

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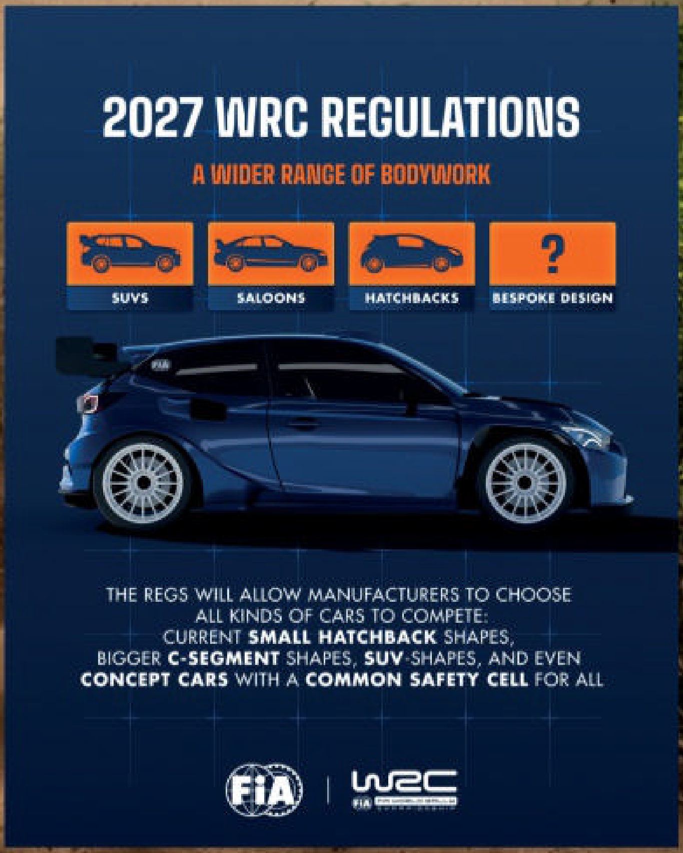

2027 WRC REGULATIONS

A WIDER RANGE OF BODYWORK

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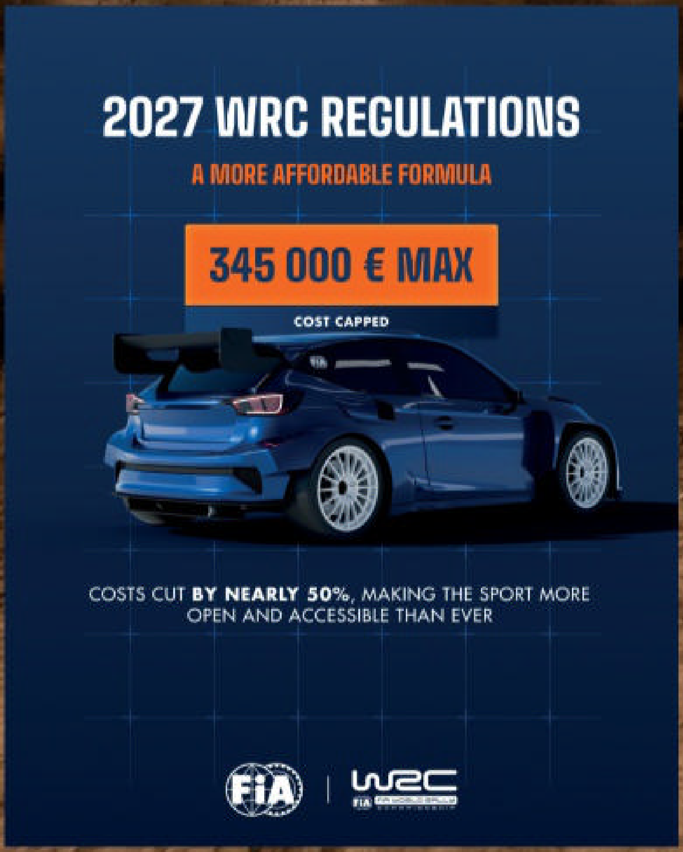

2027 WRC REGULATIONS

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JAANUS REE / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Amid ongoing uncertainty over the future participation of at least one manufacturer, there is a lot riding on the success of the FIA's 2027 regulations for the World Rally Championship. Even before the governing body's announcement of the rules in December last year, there was growing anticipation for the release of the WRC's pathway.

The current Rally1 ruleset, introduced in 2022, produced spectacular cars, made incredible advances in safety, embraced hybrid power until 2024, and led the way in pioneering the use of sustainable fuel. But these cars come at an eye-watering cost of almost €1million each, far exceeding the original target. The regulations also failed to deliver on one key objective – attracting new manufacturers to the championship.

Under Rally1, the category has rarely gained more than 10 cars per round, which stakeholders agree is not enough. There is a widespread feeling that a reset is required to ensure that current marques Toyota, Hyundai (yet to commit beyond 2025) and Ford via M-Sport remain on board, while breathing new life into the WRC by increasing the amount of competitors, and cutting costs.

"It is not about the time fixing it, it is [about] fixing it," said FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem when asked about addressing the current issues at the season-opener in Monte Carlo. "If it takes three years or four years, it will take as long as it takes, but not to let it slip. The more we let it slip, the harder it will be, and then it will be beyond repair.

"Look at the product, do we have a good product? Yes, but there are issues we have that can be fixed. I believe with the new regulations we can go forward. It is about listening to people, and I feel the drivers, the fans, the OEMs and media have a lot to say. Things are moving in the right direction and at least we have a [FIA] department that is listening.

"We have to make sure that the regulations we approve are flexible, but strict down the road and affordable. Then the promoter has to make sure this product is polished. We have a good product, but we have to sell it."

What has been proposed?

After months of consultation with manufacturers and stakeholders, the FIA's blueprint for the future of the WRC appears to tick many boxes. To be known as 'WRC27', the regulations will operate over a 10-year cycle, instead of the previous and more traditional five-year period.

The cars will be more versatile and built to a cost cap of €345,000, which the FIA says is a 50% reduction in costs from the current formula. It hopes that this will encourage more teams and manufacturers to compete, while tuners will also be eligible to build chassis and buy parts from manufacturers in order to participate.

The spaceframe chassis concept introduced alongside Rally1 cars in 2022 will remain, but it will be versatile to incorporate various powertrains, and will theoretically enable the use of hatchback, saloon and SUV body types.

In order to meet an ambitious cost cap, cars will be largely based on the current Rally2 regulations, including the engine (which will be powered by sustainable fuel) and featuring less downforce, with speeds expected to be similar to 2016 WRC machinery. Cheaper and more durable materials are likely to be used for many components. Simpler double-wishbone suspension will also be incorporated to limit costs.

Running costs for teams are set to be reduced by » limiting personnel, reducing logistics costs, plus increasing the use of local facilities and data connectivity to aid offsite engineering.

When the regulations were announced, there was a big focus on flexibility on powertrains, allowing the prospect of EV and hydrogen-powered cars. This is the FIA's eventual goal, but it has since clarified that only internal combustion-engined cars will contest the championship from the outset of the new regulation cycle in 2027.

Should a competitor wish to build a programme around a car featuring a non-ICE powertrain, then it is anticipated that the FIA will manage the equivalence of technology by using a torque meter – a process already used in the Dakar Rally.

From 2027, the championship will effectively run under one main class. It will feature the new WRC27 cars and the current Rally2 machines before the latter class reaches the end of its lifespan.

"We have good contact [with manufacturers] so we know the future will be good," said the FIA's technical director, Xavier Mestelan Pinon.

The reaction

It's a lot of information to digest and the clock is ticking – the average timeframe for a new player to build and develop a car for a major motorsport programme is more than a year. Toyota, Hyundai and M-Sport have been largely receptive to the plan, but there remain several grey areas up for discussion.

M-Sport, which runs as a semi-works operation, can see the advantage of opening up the ability for 'tuners' to build chassis, but has concerns over the scenario of WRC27 cars and Rally2 machinery competing against each other.

"I think 2027 is quite close so it's good that we have the vision and the regulations mostly in place, but the next three or four months will be vital because to create a car by 2027 is pretty hard going," says M-Sport team principal Richard Millener. "I think [the price] is ambitious.

"Is what has been proposed good enough for a top category and are we sure we want to compete directly against the Rally2? I guess it will depend on the number of teams that commit to 2027. If there is not the possibility to commit for 2027, maybe there is more time to tweak the regulations for 2028.

"I think 20 cars in the top category is too much, the perfect number for me would be 12-15. I do think that the spaceframe chassis and the direction is really interesting. If someone like M-Sport is capable of building the chassis and the drivetrain, then the team can be run by anybody. We should think outside of OEMs as there are not so many of them anymore. Maybe we need to get semi-works teams or privateer teams supported by OEMs.

"At the same time, to move the sport forward there's an element of OEM versus private investment as well, and private teams buying the chassis off teams and running their own body – like Formula 1, where teams buy engines. That works and that's where I think it should go, but there is still a lot to finalise."

Millener isn't alone in questioning whether the WRC27 cars are "good enough" to be a top-category machine. Drivers have also raised concerns that slower cars won't be as spectacular for the crowds, one area in which Rally1 has been a huge success.

"There are some positive points, but there are still a few things that are unclear," says Toyota's championship leader Elfyn Evans. "I don't understand the obsession of making the cars so slow. But I think the [current] cars are unnecessarily expensive for the level of performance we have at the moment, and this [2027 regulation] is a step towards [being more affordable]. We have the safest cars ever and there is an obsession to make average speed the safety point of the cars, which I don't understand at all.

Top right: performance set to mirror 2016 machinery

Middle: Rally2 rules will provide basis for new cars

Bottom: Ben Sulayem stresses need to sell this "good product"

"I think the cost targets are a bit unrealistic, but other than that there is still a lot of positive stuff. Using less composites to make the panels to try and keep the costs under control and a more sensible engine platform is all really welcome. It should open up the category. It still needs to be spectacular – that is an asset we have as a sport at the moment."

Toyota "is happy" with the concept in general. While admitting that the €345,000 cost cap represents a challenge, technical director Tom Fowler says there would be "no point in it existing" if it was easy to work within.

"We are happy with the overall direction of the regulations in the sense that it fits the situation and the priorities in the WRC, which is to increase participation," opines Fowler. "To go into another regulation where you can build multi-million-euro cars, where potentially there might be only our five cars, while it might be nice for our drivers and engineers, if there's nobody to race against it doesn't make any sense.

"In that sense the Rally2 car is at the moment a very popular and attractive formula for many people, and to take what is good from that and what is good from the top-flight Rally1 and combine those into a more affordable and practical package is what has to happen for 2027 to increase the participation.

"A really good goal would be to retain everyone that [currently builds] a Rally1 car and Rally2 car and if one or two tuners join, then we've got a really good situation. If one or two of the current ones don't want to do a car and they are replaced by one or two tuners, then we are still in quite a good place."

While currently no marque or team has officially confirmed its participation in 2027, the manufacturer over which there is significant uncertainty regarding its short-term future is Hyundai. The 2027 vision could prove crucial in determining the South Korean car maker's direction following its recent decision to embark upon a World Endurance Championship programme under its Genesis brand.

"It is still a work in progress both on detail and the more fundamental questions," reckons Hyundai team principal Cyril Abiteboul. "We should not lose sight of the fact that these regulations need to be designed for attracting more manufacturers and for keeping the current manufacturers, as well as attracting a wider audience and providing new business and monetisation opportunities.

"First and foremost the regulation should increase the number of competitors. That is where we need to receive some guarantees or some understanding from the FIA and the decision makers. We really need to understand where the sport is, and what is its fundamental objective."

McKLEIN

McKLEIN

@WORLD / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

No time for NAP-ping…

NAPA Racing UK isn't just the umbrella for the Alliance Racing-run British Touring Car Championship team of Ford Focus STs; its owner Pete Osborne also oversees schemes to support an armada of deserving talents – including a battalion of Mini Challenge racers. Here they are ready for the off at a Brands Hatch test. Lined up behind the Focuses of Ash Sutton, Dan Rowbottom, Dan Cammish and Osborne's older son Sam are the premier-class JCW Minis of Cameron Richardson, younger Osborne Jamie, Lewis Selby and Alex Solley, and the Wera Alliance Academy Mini Challenge Trophy cars of Alfie Garford, Jenson Mason and Murray Richardson. Not all the Minis looked so pristine at the end of the day – but that's what testing's for…

Photographer Jakob Ebrey/JEP

Where Brands Hatch, Kent, UK
When Friday 21 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R3,
RF70-200mm lens, 1/320th @ F8

CIANFLONE/GETTY IMAGES

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

TRIPLE CHAMP LOWNDES OUT OF TRIPLE EIGHT FOR 2026

Three-time Australian Supercars champion Craig Lowndes will split with his team of 20 years, Triple Eight, at the end of this season to remain a General Motors driver. Lowndes will join with a to-be-named Chevrolet Supercars team, while Triple Eight becomes a Ford squad next season.

He joined Triple Eight when it was a Ford team in 2005 and took the squad's maiden V8 Supercars victory the same year. Lowndes has won six Bathurst 1000 races with the team, which switched to GM's Holden marque in 2010. Since he stepped down from racing full-time at the end of 2018, he became a co-driver, before in 2022 moving to T8's Wildcard programme, in which he is joined by and mentors a young driver. That will continue this season, when he races alongside Super2 champion Zach Bates in The Bend 500 and Bathurst 1000.

"I have nothing but good feelings and great memories from my time at Triple Eight," Lowndes said. "This has been a very tough decision and one that has taken a lot of time and thought to work through. Loyalty has always been a key factor in my time with Triple Eight but, at this stage of my career, I think it is the best decision to make for my future.

"Thank you to everyone who has been part of the journey, inside the team and beyond."

PHIL BRANAGAN

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

BROWN IS ONE OF THREE TO WIN GOLD BEFORE RAIN

Three races with three different winners sounds like ingredients for a great Supercars weekend. Albert Park's Australian Grand Prix support event had that – but it was still frustrating.

Broc Feeney took pole position for all the races and took victory in the opening encounter on Thursday. Triple Eight team-mate Will Brown won Saturday's race and, in the middle, Cam Hill took a first-time success for Matt Stone Racing, all three wins coming in Chevrolet Camaros.

What was frustrating was that Sunday's race was rained off and that may have an impact on the championship. With his strong results (second, third and the win), Brown vaulted to the top of the championship points, but we never got to see what he may have done on Sunday, from a lowly 18th on the grid. On the other hand, opening-round dominator Cam Waters, who had already scratched out strong race results from bad starting positions, would have started from fifth on the grid in his Tickford Racing Ford Mustang.

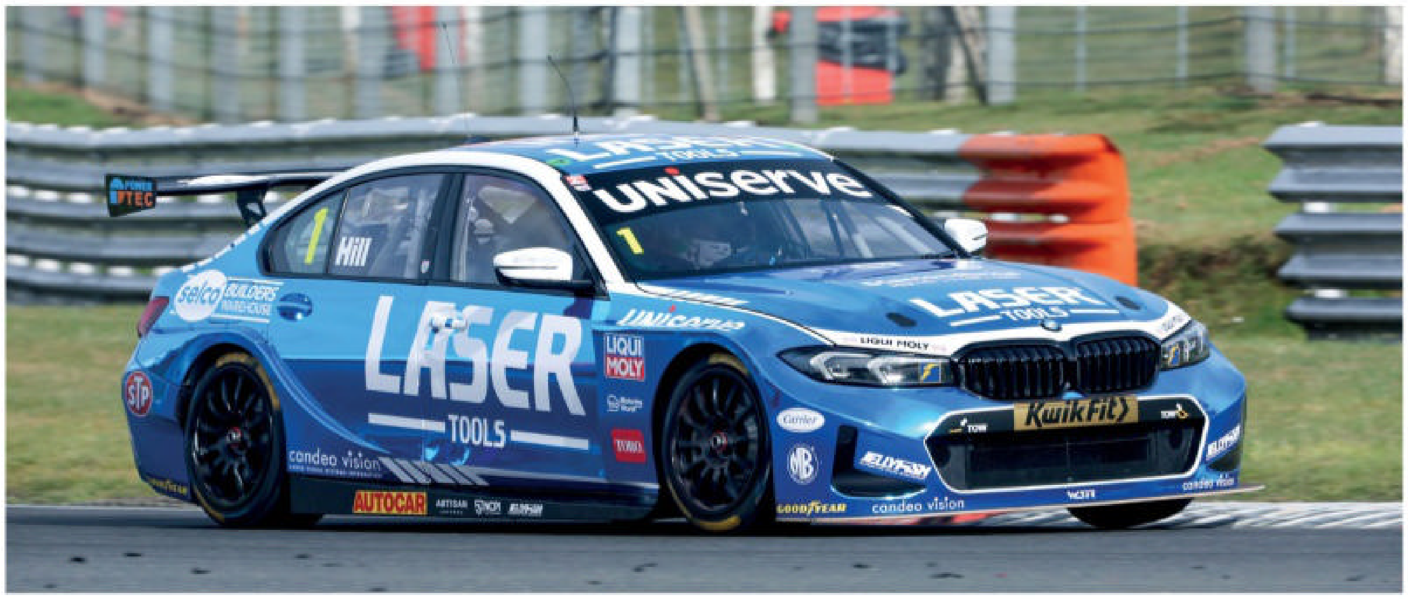
The Stone team had a very strong weekend, Nick Percat following Hill home for a Friday 1-2 and then wrestling his suddenly power-steering-less car to third on a stifling hot Saturday.

The next round is at Taupo, New Zealand on 11-13 April.

PHIL BRANAGAN

Brown won on Saturday and now tops points

BANIK/SPEED MEDIA/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES



TURKINGTON TESTS HILL'S CAR

The new livery for reigning British Touring Car champion Jake Hill's West Surrey Racing BMW hit the track in March at a Brands Hatch test – in the hands of four-time title winner Colin Turkington! The Northern Irishman was called up because Hill was racing a Ferrari in the clashing Mugello 12 Hours. WSR is working on a commercial tie-up that would bring Turkington back to the BTCC for the 2026 campaign.

Photograph by Gary Hawkins

33 BrandsHatch
32 BrandsHa
GENESYS
KRULIVE
Kwik Fit
AIRTEC

Hamilton is racing to support the disabled

BTCC

PMR STAYS; HAMILTON RETURNS

Evans Halshaw
POWER MAXED
Kwik Fit

JEP

Doble and PMR are back on the grid

The British Touring Car Championship grid is full for 2025, with 24 cars set for the opening round at Donington Park on 26-27 April.

After fears that the field would total not too much more than the standard 20 from last year, the final few weeks of the silly season were awash with good news, with reigning Independents champion team Power Maxed Racing making the cut after all, and a high-profile surprise return for Nic Hamilton, the younger brother of seven-time Formula 1 king Lewis.

PMR had painted a gloomy picture in February when the new parent company of title sponsor Evans Halshaw pulled the plug mid-contract, but a new tie-up with Motor Parts Direct allowed the team to get a deal over the line with Mikey Doble, the 2025 Jack Sears Trophy champion, to pilot a solo Vauxhall Astra. Team boss Adam Weaver said he is open to running a second car should a driver with budget materialise, but this will not happen for the start of the season.

Hamilton is back thanks to Un-Limited Motorsport acquiring an extra Cupra Leon and TBL entrants licence to add to its existing pair of Max Hall and Dexter Patterson. He has been absent from racing since his sudden split with Team Hard, where he raced the same model of car, midway through 2023.

"Bob [Sharpless, Un-Limited boss] and his team got in touch at the end of December, which is very late to be able to go and get sponsors and everything that you need," said Hamilton. "He gave me a real good deal that I thought would be possible to get in terms of the funding, and I said to him, 'Yeah why not? I'll give it a go.' Fortunately through blood, sweat, tears and some late nights, and thanks to my partners that believe in me, I got the budget together and I'm back on the grid!"

Hamilton, who has cerebral palsy, added that he is striving to "elevate disability and do a lot for disabled individuals in motorsport, to make the world realise that motorsport is inclusive, that disabled people should be proud, and that motorsport can accept them".

Speedworks Motorsport completed its Toyota Gazoo Racing line-up with James Dorlin, the 2020 Porsche Sprint Challenge GB champion who has shone in British GT. Four-time BTCC race winner Stephen Jelley is back after a year in Carrera Cup GB to race a One Motorsport Honda Civic Type R alongside Josh Cook, and another returnee is Michael Crees in the final Excelr8 Hyundai.

MARCUS SIMMONS

P113 BTCC PREVIEW

RACE WINNERS 8 March - 30 March

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Melbourne 13-16 March

Race 1	Broc Feeney (Triple Eight Chevrolet)
Race 2	Cameron Hill (Matt Stone Racing Chev)
Race 3	Will Brown (Triple Eight Chevrolet)
Race 4	Abandoned

POINTS 1 **Brown** 467; 2 Cameron Waters 460; 3 Feeney 418.

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Phoenix 9 March
Christopher Bell
(Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota)

Las Vegas 16 March
Josh Berry
(Wood Brothers Racing Ford)

Homestead 23 March
Kyle Larson
(Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet)

Martinsville 30 March
Denny Hamlin
(Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota)

POINTS 1 **William Byron** 259; 2 Larson 243; 3 Chase Elliott 227.

SRO/JEP

HONDA KID JOINS GOAT FOR MOVE TO WORLD TOUR

Exciting young tin-top talent Ignacio Montenegro (above) has stepped up to the TCR World Tour for this season to form an all-Argentinian line-up in the GOAT Racing Honda Civic Type R squad with veteran Esteban Guerrieri.

The 20-year-old Montenegro is a protege of Honda's European customer racing partner JAS Motorsport, and won the Touring Car Gold Medal at last year's FIA Motorsport Games, as well as finishing third in TCR Europe. That came after claiming the 2023 TCR South America title. The series starts in May at Mexico City.

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INSIDER

Jake Hill can't wait to get cracking on defending his BTCC crown

I must admit, I got a little bit emotional seeing the number 1 on my BMW for the first time. Everyone knows how hard me and dad, and Mark Blundell and Alex Watts from MB Motorsport, have worked to accomplish our collective dream of winning the British Touring Car Championship. Doing that in 2024 is the biggest achievement of my racing career and one of the biggest in my life full stop. It's a massively proud moment for me coming into this year with a really cool-looking Laser Tools Beemer with the number 1 on the side, and I'm really excited to be going again.

Being totally honest, I'm really sad Colin Turkington is not there. When I first joined West Surrey Racing in 2022, understandably there was a bit of hesitation from Colin's side because I'd come in and rocked the boat, and we were just as quick as each other, and that remained pretty much throughout our time together. Some days Colin was quicker in qualifying, and maybe I'd be a bit better in the races, but overall, especially last year, we became decent mates, and there was no question that he was a great team-mate to me in the last round, and helped me get that title across the line.

So I'm sad that Colin's not there; he's such an amazing driver and character to help develop the car. The car's taken another turn obviously this year with no hybrid, so the balance has shifted again, and it was nice to bounce off Colin with the chassis dynamics and stuff to help come up with a great all-round car for everyone. But at the end of the day we've got to move on. I've only just started working with them, but I've still got three decent team-mates – Aiden Moffat, Daryl DeLeon and Charles Rainford – around me, and I'm sure we're going to have a fantastic year. But make no mistake, Colin is a loss not only to West Surrey but also to the BTCC.

People assume I know Charles well because of his background in historics, where I do a lot of racing, but we've never actually raced against each other. I know he races a Capri but he hasn't got it into Goodwood yet. I do know him – he's a Kent boy like me, and as I was leaving the instructing school at Brands Hatch he was joining. Obviously he's done fantastically well in the Porsche Carrera Cup, which is no mean feat. I've done a few rounds of that championship, I know how tough it is, I know how tricky the cars are to drive, and if you're at the front in that then you're a good driver – there's no mistake.

It's been an incredibly busy start to my year. January is normally a very quiet time for us as touring car drivers, but I did the Dubai 24 Hours and the Abu Dhabi 6 Hours, which was the start of my GT3 racing career. It's been really great to join Era Motorsport at the start of that journey together, because it's a new beginning for them as well. We recently did Mugello where we took our Ferrari 296 to our first overall podium, and a second in pro-am, and we look forward to more to come soon.

And we did the Adelaide Motorsport Festival, which was incredible. It was like an Australian version of the Festival of Speed. I loved everything about it – the country, the atmosphere, the people – and the cars weren't bad either! I got to spend an awful lot of time in Jackie Oliver's Formula 5000 Shadow DN6B, which he very nearly won the 1976 American championship in, and my God, what a fantastic car that is to drive. I genuinely fell in love with it. It fits me perfectly, just a really nice thing to be in. I was reacquainted with my 'Mosport' Mk1 Shadow Can-Am car that I made famous again at the Festival of Speed! And then two very surprising cars that I got to drive that were on my bucket list: a Ford Fusion NASCAR that was Marcos Ambrose's Watkins Glen-winning car, and the Kenwood-liveried RS500 Sierra Cosworth Group A car, which was mega. That was really special because that's my favourite era of touring car racing, and the NASCAR is beyond cool.

Just before Mugello, I was at MIRA for shakedown in my BTCC BMW. First feelings were fantastic. It's nice to be in a car again that's 50kg lighter, which they should be. No one really was a massive lover of how much weight they put on with the hybrid. And the engines are even more powerful with the eco fuel, which is fantastic. It's nice that an eco substance is actually making more power than the thing that's bad for the planet.

> ***"It's nice that an eco substance is actually making more power than the thing that's bad for the planet"***

The absolute focus is to do BTCC title number two, and I feel extremely confident that we've got a fantastic BMW underneath us again, but you never know what the others have brought to the party. Two years ago we had the NAPA dominance, and last year was extremely tight – especially for me and Tom Ingram. And Ash Sutton would have been there had he not had a couple of bodywork issues, so NAPA are still absolutely there as far as I'm concerned. I think we're going into another amazing year of British Touring Car racing. It's anyone's for the taking, and it's an exciting time. We're moving forward with another element of sustainability, and I think the touring cars are going to be much better for it – to drive and hopefully for the fans as well. I'm super-excited.

FLASHBACK!

Three-time champion Gordon Shedden is back in the British Touring Car Championship for 2025. And the Toyota newcomer's first day in a BTCC car for 29 months came on a March day at Snetterton

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

Third – and most recent – BTCC title for Shedden came in 2016

TO THE MAJORITY for whom Snetterton is a drive east, there's something that raises the spirits as you glide past the endless fields along the A11. Perhaps it's the rising sun in front of you, bringing promise of a new day. Until, 15 miles or so from destination, suddenly the clouds have rolled in from the North Sea.

"It's as cold as I always remember Snetterton," chirps Gordon Shedden. "There's glorious sunshine and not a cloud in the sky at Knockhill, I can tell you that!"

For 'Flash' it's not just a new day; it's a new dawn for a third-time-around British Touring Car Championship career. The 46-year-old Scot has had only historic racing to occupy him for the past two years, alongside his day job as commercial chief at Knockhill. For him, it's not only the end of the short, dark days of a Scottish winter, but an emergence from hibernation from modern racing since the end of the 2022 season.

The arrival of the three-time BTCC champion at the Speedworks Motorsport-run Toyota Gazoo Racing UK team was one of the great 'nobody-saw-that-one-coming' moments of recent silly seasons, especially since it was way back in 2009 that he raced anything other than a Team Dynamics Honda in the series. At Snetterton, on Thursday 27 March, it's his first day at the wheel of the Toyota Corolla GR Sport he will campaign this year, and was newly built for Josh Cook to race in 2024. It's a private test, but 15 of the 24 BTCC competitors are here, getting ready for the series' official days at Croft the following week.

"It is very fresh," declares Shedden as he glances towards his unliveried car in the garage. "But we are here, it's dry, I think the forecast looks OK, but to be honest the day's just ach… We've just got to run round, get used to the systems and see exactly what we've got. I'm looking at some tired eyes that have worked pretty hard to get two cars here today [Shedden and Aron Taylor-Smith are the only two Speedworks drivers running, with Ronan Pearson's and James Dorlin's being readied for Croft], so let's just have a good sensible day, set the basis and platform and then go from there.

"Bumping into people up and down the pitlane, some people have run before, some haven't. The removal of hybrid means everyone's learning and I think that's good for us, because everyone's got something to change and tweak from last year."

BY SHEDDEN'S OWN lofty standards, 2021 and 2022 – when he returned to the BTCC with Dynamics after his globe-trotting interlude in the World Touring Car Cup – did not quite live up to expectations: sixth (2021) and seventh (2022) in the points, with four wins across the two seasons to bring his career tally to 52. Arguably he might still be adding to that with Dynamics, had the sudden pullout of Halfords from its long-running sponsorship deal with that team not caused its departure at the start of 2023.

"It was OK," he counters. "2021 was pretty good. We had all sorts of dramas. Here at Snetterton we were on pole, and we lost it by the rear wing being half a degree out or something, and we had to start at the back. The engine went at Thruxton. There were a fair few things that year that didn't really kind of help. And to be fair in 2022 we had a lot of hybrid issues. It was still a decent year in areas, you know? I still won two races that year and finished on the podium multiple times. 'Cookie' [Josh Cook] used that car the year after [with One Motorsport] and didn't really get anywhere near it."

With hybrid introduced for 2022, Shedden has a theory on why Dynamics may have been hit harder than other teams by its arrival. "We just struggled really to get the balance right with that hybrid," he reflects. "The Honda engine was particularly susceptible to where the boost was. It performs very well as a normal engine but, as soon as we ended up with the extra weight and everything, it tipped it just a little bit left of centre. I don't think we optimised the performance. 'Cookie' jumped from the TOCA engine, which had bags of boost and loads of torque, and realised it was quite tricky when he jumped into what I'd had." »

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Last time around: Shedden on his way to victory at Donington Park in 2022

HYBRID IS GONE now, yet Shedden has another theory on how it may also have impacted his new weapon: the Corolla. Ironically, this is the car in which series organiser TOCA developed the system, yet its best seasons were most definitely before 2022. As with the Civic, it's simply a matter of dimensions. "It's obviously a small car and I think they were very limited, especially in the cooling, as to what they could physically fit in the engine bay, so I think taking that hybrid out shouldn't do any harm," he argues. "Arguably the hybrid maybe suited the slightly bigger cars by virtue of the space for the motor, the cooling, the way the battery could go. Hopefully the Toyota comes back into its own."

Speedworks has made a habit in recent years of shaking its machinery down at Toyota's test track near Derby. This year, there simply hasn't been time. Now that the team is here, at Snetterton, it wants to ensure everything is right before the cars head out. Taylor-Smith is first on track, the sun now shining brightly; Shedden's comeback begins with an installation lap at 11.10am. The morning is all about making sure everything is working properly. This is, effectively, the team's shakedown after all.

"The car is brand new," points out Shedden. "Two weeks ago there was nothing bolted onto it whatsoever. The winters are never long enough, are they? It's just a couple of little things with the rule changes that we need to get ironed out."

The green flag for the afternoon session is waved at 1.30pm and, five minutes later, the first engine fires up and it's Shedden heading out. Back he comes to the pitlane, and the Toyota is parked on the apron with its engine-blipping, tyres changed, before he heads back out for his first run of four flying laps. The best is a 1m58.318s, and he's soon out for another four, and quickly works down to 1m56.795s. On his next run, you can see the old magic coming back, the car squirming on the brakes into the esses, kicking up the dust on the left apex. The puff of smoke as the Toyota brakes through the endless Coram curve for the final turn shows we're in business. Until there's a red flag.

"Yeah, I was building into it, and off the shakedown tyres but still used tyres," explains Shedden. "It was coming in and... familiar story, but I was way up on the delta when the red flags came out!"

AH, IT LOOKS as though the patriotic Scots can dig their Saltires out of the cupboard for the August trip to Knockhill. Shedden is just one of four drivers from north of the border on the BTCC grid this year, and his home round is one of the key events for the circuit where he holds such a key role. "I've always said that the crowd at Knockhill are just incredible," he declares. "That's because they're so close to the action, and it's just a real partisan atmosphere. We will definitely have the place rocking. We want people to enjoy motorsport, to enjoy touring cars, and if they've got something to shout about then all the better!"

As well as 2023-24, Shedden also missed out on racing at home in the BTCC in 2018-20 due to his World Touring Car adventure. If not for that, who knows? Given the pace of the new FK8 Civic in those first three years he was absent, maybe he could have equalled – or even surpassed – four-time champions Andy Rouse, Colin Turkington and Ash Sutton.

"Ifs, buts and maybes, and everybody up and down the pitlane has got the same," he reasons. "World touring cars was an opportunity which I couldn't turn down. I'm really glad I did it – I'd probably rather I did it in a different car, but it was an experience, and you've got to have the bad things to appreciate the good, and I definitely came back stronger from that world journey. It wasn't an easy time but it made me a more rounded, more complete driver. It wasn't great, but I can still call myself a world touring car race winner." »

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Shedden gets down to business in his new home: the Toyota Corolla

IN THE PITLANE, former BTCC technical chief Peter Riches, who lives locally, has popped into the Speedworks garage for a natter. "How's the house in Florida?" enquires Shedden, before we veer onto the current political situation. "How are things going at Knockhill?" asks Riches.

And what is Speedworks making of its new McHollywood signing? "The really good news at the end of the day is that 'Flash' is really positive about the feeling that he's got from the car when he starts to lean on it," smiles team principal Christian Dick. "The balance feels good for him. I think we're in good shape."

And with complete car rebuilds over the winter, teething issues are bound to strike. "Every car, every chassis is taken down to a bare metal shell again," explains Dick. They're repanelled, rejigged to make sure everything is where it should be, the rigidity of the chassis is checked, everything is checked to make sure that they are exactly where they need to be. All of the electronics are sent away for testing, servicing, and replaced where they need to be. Same with gearbox, drivetrain plus any of the modifications that you're implementing to chassis, bodywork, cooling system. It doesn't matter how much time you've got – you always feel that you're right on the cusp of it when you get to the start of the race season!

"All of that while you're trying to get contracts in place with drivers, sponsors. There's lots of balls to juggle, that's for sure."

There's time for another brief run of two flying laps, during which Shedden lowers his best to a 1m56.351s. And he is out of the car – 34 laps covered over the day – when the final flurry of times comes in, with Dan Cammish's Alliance Racing-run NAPA Ford on top at 1m54.133s. Taylor-Smith, in the sister car, has managed a 1m55.575s on this 'shakedown' day. "It's OK," relates 'Flash'. "We've done nothing on tyres. It's a new car build, but we'll go to Croft next week and the overriding feeling is that what I've got under me is good, that it will be fast."

The eyes are shining with enthusiasm and gratitude as Shedden bids farewell to the team before he heads for Stansted to catch his flight home. "I feel happy, and that's the most important thing," he beams. "Knowing what tyres I'm on, what engine mode we're using, I'm comfortable. This is about learning. We're just scratching the surface. We've not tuned the car to how I want it; it's very much as it came out of the truck this morning. We're just trying to do all the install stuff. I can't wait to get going!" It's clear that he's back in business.

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TRIPPING THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Everyone's dancing for joy at the removal of the heavy hybrid, and that's just one of many things to anticipate in the 2025 BTCC

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP** AND **GARY HAWKINS**

FASTER, BUT BY HOW MUCH?

The dropping of hybrid from the British Touring Car Championship – with the turbo now solely responsible for producing a similar power boost as an overtaking aid – has slashed 55kg from the machinery. And series organiser TOCA has made sure it keeps the 'eco' box ticked by introducing 100% sustainable fuel.

It's great for the drivers, but has left the engineers with a new set of problems to solve. "It's funny because you spend so much time getting the car to work with weight," says Antonio Carrozza, who has been the brains behind the success of four-time champion Ash Sutton, going back to their days with the success-ballast-laden Infiniti Q50 and, since 2022, with the Alliance Racing-run Ford Focus ST.

"Everybody's going to pre-season testing, and the first time they get in the car they're going, 'This is brilliant, feels great'. But you have to make that lightweight car better than everyone else's lightweight car. Initially the hard part is knowing what your benchmark is. What are we actually aiming for? If we're going three tenths quicker, should we be going half a second quicker? And you don't really know what everyone's up to. You don't know where their engine performance is at, where their weight's at – because you can always run slightly

JEP

Sutton presses on at Brands on his first day back in the car

New boy Rainford (above and here with WSR chief Dick Bennetts) has shone in tests

heavier in testing – and what their tyre conditions are like. Until we get to qualifying round one, I don't think any of us will know how good a job we've done."

After the dazzling 2023 season for the Focuses, 2024 was a step backwards. Probably the biggest area of development over this winter has been from engine supplier Mountune, after the drivers felt that the doubling of the hybrid/turbo power boost for last season translated less effectively to their delivery than others'. Sutton also felt chassis improvements made in the summer break were masked by the soggy autumn race weekends.

"And we were done over by the British weather with the 2024 test programme," adds Carrozza. "Because it was so often damp or wet the night before, you'd lose half the morning and you'd probably get a couple of hours clean in the afternoon and then it would rain. We did five test days last year but we only got about eight hours of proper running. And during that time we're trying to back-to-back the 2023 car, which for us was our best reference, and try to take steps in different directions, and we never really found anything that worked.

"When we turned up for 2024 the tyres had changed, and suddenly it's not quite as rosy as it looked in testing. Everyone else was chasing that bit more, probably because they didn't have the benchmark they could fall back to. So we were a victim of our own success…

"I'm confident with what we've done this winter. It's been a really good step for us, but is it going to translate onto the circuit?"

BIGGER GRID WITH NEW TALENTS

The boost from 20 cars to 24 on the grid for this year's British Touring Car Championship is a great result in a difficult economic climate. And it's a figure that series boss Alan Gow hankered for during the days of grid-busting surplus when, let's be honest, some of the drivers were arguably a bit… meh.

"As you know, that's the number I always think is ideal – 24 is perfect," proclaims the Australian. "And I don't think there's anyone on the grid who isn't there by right – they're good-performing drivers."

One encouraging aspect is the influx of young, new talent to the grid. There are eight drivers eligible for the Jack Sears Trophy, for those with a maximum of one overall podium finish. While Daryl DeLeon (West Surrey Racing BMW) and Ronan Pearson (Speedworks Motorsport Toyota) have already made an impression, debutants include their respective team-mates Charles Rainford and James Dorlin, plus hot Mini Challenge prospect Max Hall in an Un-Limited Motorsport Cupra.

"There's a lot of new drivers that have never been linked to the BTCC before," continues Gow. "You always need new talent. That proves the value of the series."

Some deserving cases, however, will not be present. Mini talisman Dan Zelos shone on his late-season outings in 2024 but has been unable to convert that into a BTCC seat this season, while underdog crowd favourite Bobby Thompson is still priced out of the series. At the opposite end of the scale, commercial pressures have kyboshed four-time champion Colin Turkington and played their part in 2012 World Touring Car king Rob Huff not staying on. But, in Huff's stead at Speedworks comes Gordon Shedden to carry the flame for the old guard.

"I don't think 'Flash' would like to be called 'old guard'!" chortles Gow. "He's a three-time champion and it's great to »

Ingram leads team-mate Chilton in testing. But he could do with damp running

have such a well-known racer and champion on the grid. His reputation speaks for itself."

It's been an off-season of very minor tweaking to the sporting regulations. Last year's obligation for the top 10 in race one to run the hardest available remaining tyres from their allocation in race two did little other than to prove that soft tyres are quicker than medium, which are faster than hard. This has now been reduced to just the top three. "Every year we're tweaking things, and this just mixes it up a little bit more," explains Gow.

The three-stage, IndyCar-style qualifying format remains. Last year's big drop-off to 20 cars made it an unfortunate time to introduce the concept, but this time around – with 24 – the jeopardy in Q1 will be much greater. "All the drivers loved the format last year, and it did what it was meant to, but it could have been a bit better," admits Gow, "but with 24 on the grid it will be great."

CAN INGRAM SOLVE DAMP DESPAIR?

Tom Ingram used to be irksomely described as 'the nearly man of the BTCC'. After winning the 2022 title to put that one to bed, he's followed that with two successive runner-up positions!

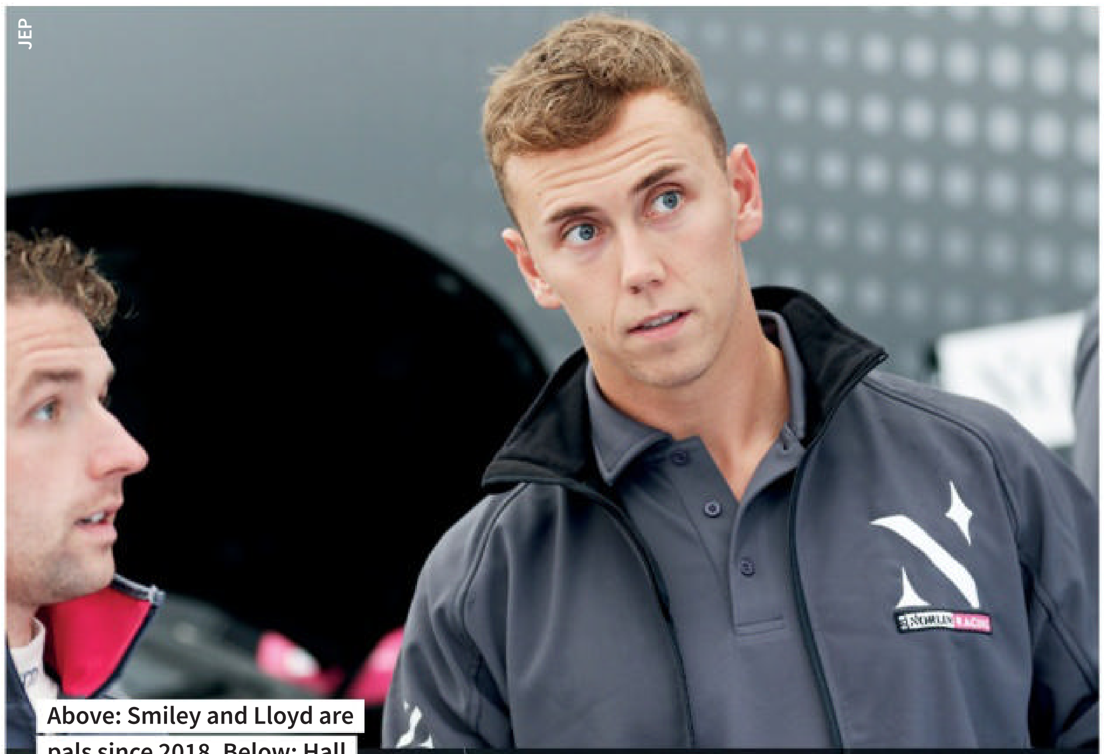
The greasy conditions in the Brands Hatch finale snatched the 2024 crown from his grasp, the Excelr8 Motorsport Hyundai i30 N reprising a lack of pace it had exhibited on a similarly damp track at Snetterton in qualifying earlier in the year. One key to the Hyundai's great step forward in 2024 had been three days of testing in March at an uncharacteristically sunny Anglesey. If Excelr8 headed back there in October, surely it would get some iffy conditions to vanquish its bugbear on a slippery track…

"Unfortunately we didn't!" exclaims Ingram. "It's typical – it was dry again.

"In the dry last year we were stonking, in the full wet we were good; it's just in those slightly greasy conditions… Going through all the bits and pieces we've seen over the winter, we've got a checklist of stuff that we're 70-80% certain is it. We just want to validate it more than anything else to confirm what we think. We could do at some point with some drizzly rain in testing."

The three days of Anglesey running, with the car in hybrid-free 2025 spec, "was really useful for us. It was good to try some bits and pieces you'd maybe been putting off as the year's gone through."

As one of the most cerebral of the BTCC drivers, Ingram does have concerns about the power boost – equivalent to last year with hybrid – now coming solely from the turbo: "I think it won't be as effective, because you have to build pressure, whereas before you were using electricity which is always going to be instant. We'll see how it pans out, but unfortunately it's going to be another one of those things that gets tweaked as the year goes through as we all learn together."



JEP

GILBERT

JEP

Above: Smiley and Lloyd are pals since 2018. Below: Hall is a promising talent

A NEW WAR OF INDEPENDENTS

After a quiet 2024, the Independents' class is shaping up nicely: eight entries representing four models of car from a quartet of teams.

The M-Sport-built TOCA engine will be powering the One Motorsport Honda Civic Type Rs of Josh Cook and Stephen Jelley, the Power Maxed Racing Vauxhall Astra of Mikey Doble, plus the trio of Un-Limited Motorsport Cupra Leons piloted by Max Hall, Dexter Patterson and Nic Hamilton. But Restart Racing's move from the Cupra to new-build Hyundai i30 Ns comes with a switch to the same-spec bespoke Swindon-tuned units as car-builder Excelr8 Motorsport.

Restart duo Chris Smiley and Dan Lloyd both have experience of the Hyundai from their respective stints at Excelr8, and Lloyd drove one to three victories in 2022 – with the Swindon unit. They will likely be a thorn in the side of Cook's quest for a third Indie crown. "I'm mega-excited in general," gushes Yorkshireman Lloyd, who is returning to the series after a year in Carrera Cup GB. "From my side, I nearly stopped racing completely at the end of last year, which would have been the biggest decision of my life, and then this opportunity presented itself to me.

"With the Hyundai and the Swindon engine, it was something I couldn't turn down and I had to make sure I made it work. Going from what I had to this opportunity, it means so much more."

Lloyd is anticipating a good battle in the Indie division. "The whole grid looks strong all over," he states. "It's gone from being a bit quiet to a really competitive field, so that's good for the championship. Obviously we haven't got the hybrid anymore, so that will mix things up in terms of set-up, but having a year out I'm coming in with a fresh mind, so I think that will help. There'll be a lot of trial and error but I've got a strong engineer. If we can win the drivers' and teams' in the Independents, and get some overall podiums, that would be fantastic."

BTCC 2025 CALENDAR

RD	DATE	VENUE
1	27 April	**Donington Park National**
2	11 May	**Brands Hatch Indy**
3	25 May	**Snetterton**
4	8 June	**Thruxton**
5	22 June	**Oulton Park**
6	3 August	**Croft**
7	17 August	**Knockhill**
8	31 August	**Donington Park GP**
9	21 September	**Silverstone**
10	5 October	**Brands Hatch GP**

BTCC ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM (CAR)
1	**Jake Hill**	West Surrey Racing (BMW 330i M Sport)
2	**Daryl DeLeon**	
16	**Aiden Moffat**	
99	**Charles Rainford**	
3	**Tom Chilton**	Excelr8 Motorsport (Hyundai i30 N)
33	**Adam Morgan**	
80	**Tom Ingram**	
777	**Michael Crees**	
12	**Stephen Jelley**	One Motorsport (Honda Civic Type R)
66	**Josh Cook**	
14	**Ronan Pearson**	Speedworks Motorsport (Toyota Corolla GR Sport)
40	**Aron Taylor-Smith**	
52	**Gordon Shedden**	
132	**James Dorlin**	
17	**Dexter Patterson**	Un-Limited Motorsport (Cupra Leon)
28	**Nicolas Hamilton**	
93	**Max Hall**	
22	**Chris Smiley**	Restart Racing (Hyundai i30 N)
123	**Dan Lloyd**	
27	**Dan Cammish**	Alliance Racing (Ford Focus ST)
32	**Dan Rowbottom**	
77	**Sam Osborne**	
116	**Ash Sutton**	
88	**Mikey Doble**	Power Maxed Racing (Vauxhall Astra)

REAPING THE REWARD OF HARD GRAFT

Dan Rowbottom was a karting star who then went through years of rejection. But his tie-up with Cataclean has brought its reward – and is far more than a simple sponsorship deal

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

"I get a lot of people calling me, and contacting me on social media, and sending me emails saying, 'You need to help my son. Can you give us some advice?' And I say, 'Listen, I can't tell you how I did it. It literally took me 10 years of 'no, no, no, no, no'.'"

Dan Rowbottom, twice a race winner in the British Touring Car Championship and now preparing for his third season with the NAPA Racing UK Ford Focus team, is perhaps wrongly perceived as some kind of motorsport sponsorship guru. He has worn the colours of fuel and exhaust system additive Cataclean throughout his BTCC career – and, before that, in the Renault UK Clio Cup. And yes, those years of rejection did get him down. But, as he admits: "All those years where I wasn't racing and I thought were a massive waste of time, I didn't realise and appreciate how much I learned about how to work business and make things work for you."

And, finally, a chance meeting with Cataclean founder Ross Baigent at the Autosport International show in 2016, when Rowbottom's Clio sported the livery of a rival company, proved there's also value in the good old-fashioned phenomenon of being in the right place at the right time. That set the wheels in motion to where

This year will be Rowbottom's third season with the NAPA Racing UK Ford Focus team

Two victories to his name in the BTCC

Renault Clio Cup was springboard into BTCC

> *"It happened to be an automotive product, which was a win-win for me, and I know how to sell stuff"*

he and the company's motorsport presence is now.

"I started recognising the opportunity when I started working with Cataclean, and I knew that actually here was a company with an incredible product," he relates. "It just happened to be an automotive product, which was a win-win here for me, and I know how to sell stuff, so I'm going to sell it for them and I'm going to tell them, 'If I get to this point in Clios, can we go touring car racing? And once we've done that, can we do this?' And that's how it's worked."

Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Rowbottom was a force in karting, winning British championship titles against a peer group that included James Calado – overall winner of the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2023 with Ferrari. But the family's small automotive business wasn't going to support the move into car racing for long. He proved a regular top-six finisher in the SEAT Cupra Cup UK of 2008, before the recession and SEAT Sport's withdrawal from racing appeared to have put the nails in the coffin of Rowbottom's career. But not so many nails that he couldn't find some leverage to start removing them several years later...

The rookie BTCC season came with the Ciceley Motorsport Mercedes team for 2019, before Rowbottom elected to sit out 2020 amid COVID lockdowns and the knock-on commercial effects at the race track. He returned in 2021 with the Team Dynamics Honda squad, notching up his first two pole positions and a maiden race win. After two years there, he joined forces with the NAPA Racing UK operation, recognising the value of not only the team's performance, but its business value to Cataclean in a BTCC that carries title sponsorship from Kwik Fit.

"The parent company of NAPA is AAG – Alliance Automotive Group," explains Rowbottom. "Although we already sold to them, our numbers into that group weren't very big, so we took the strategic decision to speak to Pete Osborne [Alliance boss] for 2023 and the guys thought it was a good opportunity.

"NAPA Auto Parts are a tier one supplier to Kwik Fit anyway, so with the assistance of NAPA – but we were already on the road ourselves – we did the deal. Obviously we had to win the tender. The BTCC gave us a massive open door into Kwik Fit, but we still had to follow the process that every other business had to. We then placed the supply deal through NAPA, so we're the manufacturer, NAPA are the distributor, Kwik Fit are the customer, and it really does prove the value of BTCC."

Rowbottom now sits on the board of Cataclean as a non-executive director, which has meant that he has felt the need to push commercial frontiers while other drivers focus on their racing. "Cataclean have been incredible," he enthuses. "They've always told me when I get to the track, just do the track stuff. But me, because these people gave me my career, if something's not finished or it's not quite done, I've always thought to get that thing done now because that person I need to speak to is here in the paddock."

Partly as a result of his open heart surgery over the winter, a dangerous operation to rectify an ailment since birth, Rowbottom is now fully focused on the racing, on bringing home trophies for himself – and, of course, his loyal backers: "Because I've got great support from people like Cataclean, I'm in a very privileged position that I can do it and I want to repay them."

MINTEX
BRAKE LININGS
6
55
639 HYM
21

HRDC on track at Goodwood

The daffodils are out, spring is in the air and historic machinery is on the track. It can only mean one thing: the Goodwood Members' Meeting is nearly here! An eclectic mix of cars took part in the Historic Racing Drivers Club's annual trackday at the Sussex circuit, with some of the more unusual including Paul Auston's Ogle SX1000 and the Colburn family's Austin A105 Westminster. A couple of Ford Fiestas were also out in preparation for the new Win Percy Trophy race at Goodwood. The day marked the first HRDC track action since Shaun Lynn acquired the organisation from Julius Thurgood (see p128).

Photographer Gary Hawkins

Where Goodwood, Sussex, UK
When Wednesday 19 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
EF16-35mm lens, 1/400th @ F6.3

Thurgood (r) says deal with Lynn helps safeguard the HRDC's future

GARY HAWKINS

HISTORICS

HRDC gets a new owner

Another race organiser changes hands as the Historic Racing Drivers Club joins Shaun Lynn's growing portfolio

STEPHEN LICKORISH

A third historic racing organiser has changed hands in the past 18 months after the Historic Racing Drivers Club was acquired by Motor Racing Legends chairman Shaun Lynn.

Prolific historics racer Lynn took over at MRL just under a year ago and his Aythorpe Promotions concern has now also added the HRDC to its portfolio. HRDC founder Julius Thurgood will remain in charge but explained that the deal will help to safeguard the future of the club, which runs the popular Jack Sears Trophy, Gerry Marshall Trophy and Allstars/Classic Alfa Challenge categories for a range of retro tin-tops and sportscars.

"It's exciting – I've known Shaun since the Top Hat days [effectively the predecessor to the HRDC] and he used to race with me," said Thurgood. "He's always been a great example of being a clean competitor, running proper legal cars and just generally championing the historic world."

Thurgood added he has been impressed by the impact Lynn has made since taking the helm of MRL. He supports Lynn's desire to clamp down on eligibility and has welcomed new ideas such as the fledgling GT3 Legends series that MRL piloted at the end of last year.

"MRL is totally invigorated, it's a new order there – it's really upbeat," said Thurgood. "We've supported the old MRL for years and bringing great grids consistently. We're just taking it to another level now – the HRDC is protected by Shaun's investment in the whole thing.

"When he took over MRL, he said, 'I want to put on good motor racing'. We've seen a huge amount of development creep over the years. When I started in historic racing properly, we would have engines built and we'd ask 'how long would they last?' and they would say that's a two-season engine. We would go to Goodwood with an engine like that and get a top-10 finish. Now you're looking at engines with just hours to run. It's a big issue."

Thurgood stressed there would be no immediate changes for HRDC competitors and the club will continue to focus on UK events, while MRL also appears at a variety of European meetings. "No personnel are changing and we will still have the caravan and the catering," he said. "But we can put our heads together for making events in 2026 and we've got some exciting ideas for some must-do events."

Lynn added: "I have the utmost respect for what Julius has accomplished over the years and it's vital to preserve what the HRDC brings to the table. We've got a huge knowledge and experience base as a group, and now we have a unique chance to put that to work."

The HRDC deal follows Masters Historic Racing also getting new ownership at the end of 2023 when Ron Maydon stepped aside and GP Extreme boss Frederic Fatien took over.

P133 OPINION

HRDC's popular series will retain focus on UK events

MICK WALKER

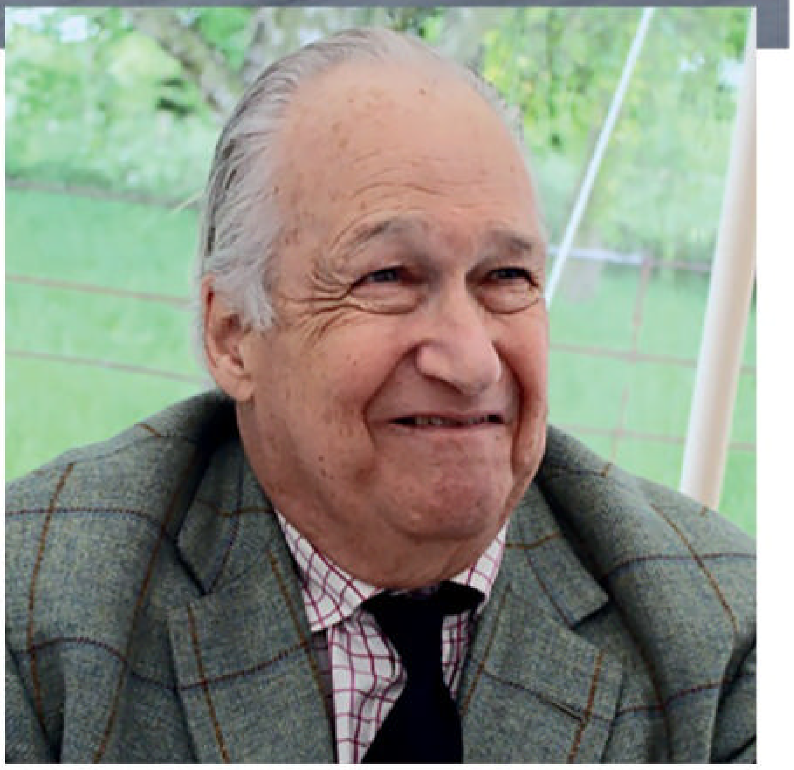
CAPRI WINS SPA 24 HRS – IMOLA – WATKINS GLEN

AUTOSPORT

Vintage Silverstone – Irish F3 – Datsun tests

SCHLEGELMILCH/GETTY IMAGES

Crabbe's squad gave Peterson his F1 debut



OBITUARY

COLIN CRABBE 1942-2025

As the head of his small Formula 1 team, Colin Crabbe, who has died aged 82, was the man who gave Ronnie Peterson his big break. But it was his influence on historic racing that was most lasting.

It was just before Crabbe's 27th birthday when his Antique Automobiles team made its F1 debut in 1969, initially with a Maserati-powered Cooper T86B, and then a McLaren M7B with Cosworth DFV engine, which Vic Elford raced to fifth place in the French Grand Prix and sixth in the British GP. With a surplus of drivers for 1970, new constructor March needed a berth in F1 for its protege Peterson. Co-founder Max Mosley therefore worked out a deal with Crabbe to run an additional 701, and the Swede finished seventh on his debut in Monaco.

Crabbe was already becoming famed for the lengths he would go to in order to track down the most fabled of machinery. As a young man in the 1960s, he had bought a Maserati 250F during a visit to Australia – its seller was successful racer Stan Jones, whose son Alan would go on to win the 1980 F1 title. Crabbe campaigned the 250F in the UK at Vintage Sports-Car Club events and moved into contemporary sportscar racing, sharing a Ford GT40 to good results in the South African Springbok series.

Meanwhile, his network of contacts had heard of a 1937 Mercedes-Benz W125 grand prix car hidden in the East German city of Leipzig since the war. Crabbe tracked it down and, in 1968, brought it to the UK (see Autosport cover inset) where he raced it energetically, twice winning the VSCC's Richard Seaman Trophy at Oulton Park. He completed the set of 'Silver Arrows' hidden behind the Iron Curtain when, in 1977, he managed to find and retrieve a 1938 Auto Union Type D in Czechoslovakia. Hugely valuable Alfa Romeo, Ferrari and Jaguar machinery were all discovered by Crabbe in the unlikeliest of Latin American or African locations, allowing them to be brought back to life and used again.

Crabbe's own racing exploits came to a dramatic end in 1988 when, at Oulton Park, his Talbot-Lago T25C made contact with an out-of-control ERA, and the resulting accident left him with rib and nerve injuries and in an induced coma.

MARCUS SIMMONS

JEP

BRM 75 CELEBRATION FOR THE GOLD CUP

A celebration of 75 years since a BRM first raced will be the central feature at July's Oulton Park Gold Cup. Organisers intend to have 25 BRMs on the circuit, headed by the recreation of the V16-engined P15 (above), and that could include Can-Am sportscars as well as grand prix cars from the 1950s-70s.

UNIQUE COOPER-FISK ON SPEED EVENTS

The unique Cooper-Fisk sprint and hillclimb car of the 1960s has finally returned to action in the hands of Peter Fisk, son of its creator David. The project started as a damaged Cooper T59 Formula Junior, which Fisk Sr developed and lengthened to take a Lotus twin-cam engine. It has now been completely restored.

HADFIELD TO SUPER CLASSIC IN RF94

Simon Hadfield has acquired a Van Diemen RF94 with a view to racing in the Super Classic Formula Ford series. The car, which ran a Zetec engine when new, has since been fitted with a Kent motor. Hadfield bought it via a French racing school that was selling up.

HYUNDAI AGREES MAJOR MSV DEAL

Hyundai has signed a three-year deal to supply almost 50 cars to circuit operator MotorSport Vision. The manufacturer's electric Ioniq 5 N will be used as safety and course cars at a range of tracks, while five Tucsons will be utilised as medical cars and six Santa Fe models will be used for VIP transport.

OLLIE READ

GT CUP

TURKINGTON EYES MORE GT OUTINGS AFTER GINETTA RACE

Four-time British Touring Car champion Colin Turkington made his GT Cup debut at Donington Park at the end of March, and says he is keen to contest more races in the discipline.

The Northern Irishman, who had to relinquish his BTCC seat at the West Surrey Racing BMW team this season due to commercial issues, shared the 24/7 Motorsport Ginetta G56 of Patrick Collins. They finished third in the GT4 class, and Turkington set some very representative lap times during his 50-minute stint.

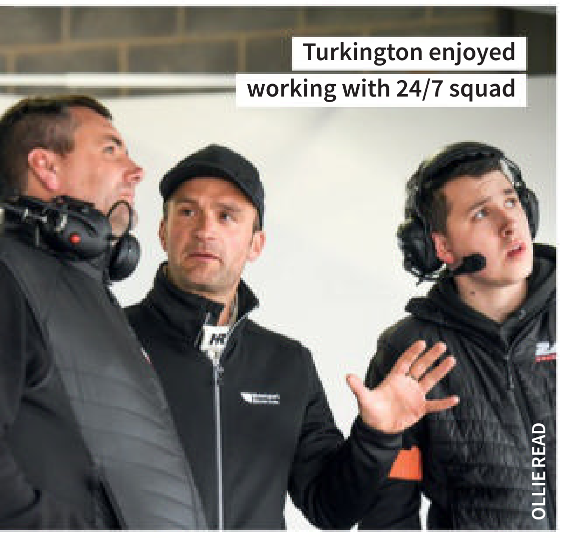
"Obviously the touring car programme didn't happen for me this year, so I just want to explore new opportunities and keep myself driving and keep sharp," said Turkington. "I tried to put something together in British GT, which unfortunately didn't come off. I got speaking to 24/7 and this opportunity came up."

Turkington added that he was keen to get into a GT paddock and gain some experience in GT4. "I wanted to see what it's all about and start the learning process – it's a different world for me," he explained. "I think the GT4 is quite representative of a touring car, whereas I imagine a GT3 is a different world altogether. That would be great but, for now, I'm really enjoying this and I think it's a good place for me to start.

"The guys at 24/7 have been super-helpful in just getting me up to speed. I think I'm ready to explore some fresh opportunities. This is just a one-off at the moment, but we'll see what develops now."

The GT Cup outing was not Turkington's first in club racing this year. He also contested the British Racing & Sports Car Club's two-hour Supersport Endurance Cup race at Silverstone a couple of weeks beforehand in a Mk3 Mazda MX-5 alongside Bruce Robinson. The duo won their class and finished fifth overall.

PAUL LAWRENCE


Turkington enjoyed working with 24/7 squad

OLLIE READ

LEGENDS

STRONG INITIAL TAKE-UP FOR NEW LEGENDS ENGINE

Legends championship chief Phil Cooper says the take-up for the category's new engine has already exceeded initial expectations after nine 900cc cars ran at the Donington Park season-opener.

The new powerplant is the latest three-cylinder Yamaha watercooled engine, which supersedes the 1250cc aircooled unit that has been used since the category was introduced to the UK nearly three decades ago.

The new engine was trialled in a test car during 2024 and is now available to all 2025 contenders. It is largely standard, apart from changes to the camshaft and valve springs. Connor Mills took the first win for the new motor in the Donington opener.

"We initially expected to have about half a dozen for this year, but we had nine out for the first races at Donington and two more are on the way," said Cooper.

Drivers will be able to continue using the old engines for as long as they choose, but Cooper expects a steady transition. "It is the future," he said. "But we have tried to make them comparable with the old engine."

One of the benefits of the new motor is that the Legends will be able to race on longer and faster circuits. This year the cars will have their first race on the Brands Hatch Grand Prix layout during the Super Touring Power weekend.

Among the early converts is 2024 champion Will Gibson, who first ran the new engine when he attended the Legends World Finals in the US late last season. "The main reason to go to the States was to try the watercooled engine, and the set-up advice we gained from that has proved useful," he said.

The new engine runs with a six-speed gearbox rather than the old five-speed 'box and incorporates an auto-blip and paddleshift. "It is an improvement, and you can go way later on the brakes," said Gibson. "It's also 30kg lighter than the old unit, and it's the latest technology."

PAUL LAWRENCE

Gibson (leading) impressed by the new watercooled engine

OLLIE READ

PAUL LAWRENCE
FV-944-BK
WXI 990
RSR

Onions and Smith have swapped their Escort Mk2s for M3s

HISTORIC RALLYING

THE RISE OF BMW M3s IN HISTORICS

British rally drivers Rob Smith and Will Onions have joined the growing ranks of competitors opting for the BMW M3 as their weapon of choice for historic rally events.

Friends and rivals Smith and Onions are stepping up from Ford Escort Mk2s with a pair of M3s from the Dutch MATS BV organisation, which is renowned for building period Group A-specification M3 rally cars and has now produced around 50 examples.

Smith and Onions have their focus on asphalt rallying, recognising that the M3 is best suited to sealed-surface events, and will tackle a range of major such fixtures this year including the Manx Rally on 11-12 April.

A big focus for later in the year is the Tour de Corse Historic in early October, an event they have both tackled before and now relish the chance to contest in the M3s. The five-day rally takes in the notoriously twisty and challenging roads of the island of Corsica, and the 2025 event is the 25th anniversary edition. The 380 places on the entry list were taken in just 18 minutes when entries opened recently.

With support from MATS, running an M3 is now a relatively straightforward operation, given that most consumables and spares are available ex-stock. MATS is now building new engines for the cars too.

The growing popularity of the M3 across European asphalt historic rallying is clear. Last November, eight such cars competed on the Killarney Historic Rally in Ireland.

"The M3 is a proper Tarmac car and you can get all you need from MATS," said Smith. "It makes a difference when you are running a car like this, because most of the parts are available in stock."

Onions and Smith shook the cars down at Blyton Park earlier this year and ended the day very impressed by their performance and driveability. After shoulder surgery, Onions found that the power-steering available on the M3 made it far easier to drive than his former BDG-engined Escort Mk2.

PAUL LAWRENCE

PAUL LAWRENCE

The duo are set to tackle the Manx Rally in their new BMWs

PAUL LAWRENCE

F1000 ACE GADD AIMS FOR CLASSIC FFORD

Ex-F1000 champion Tom Gadd is aiming to switch to Classic Formula Ford this season after a recent test in a Van Diemen RF81. Gadd sampled the ex-Tim Harvey/Henry Chart Van Diemen, a well-known car reliveried in the Numanair colours (above) used in 1981 by Mike Mackonochie for synth-pop pioneer sponsor Gary Numan.

SMITH CAN FINALLY CELEBRATE TITLE WIN

Harry Smith has been confirmed as last year's Junior Saloon champion following a National Court hearing that looked at the allocation of points for the twice red-flagged Brands Hatch finale in November, in which Smith and Jonathan Moore battled for the title.

FODEN BACK TO FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Former Mazda MX-5 champion Steve Foden has returned to the British Racing & Sports Car Club series this season. Foden spent seven years racing Mk1s, taking the 2023 title, before switching to the Audi TT Cup last year, but felt there were too many changes in one go.

FRESH FUNDING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

A government financial package totalling almost £190,000 will be shared among the organisers of two and four-wheel-based competitions in Northern Ireland. Sport NI has the job of allocating the funding and has said £37,000 will be used to install new safety barriers at Kirkistown circuit.

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INSIDER

Paul Lawrence on the great historic eligibility crackdown

The coming season is going to be a pivotal one for historic racing, as car eligibility comes under the spotlight in a new initiative from three of the leading historic race promoters.

For some time, there have been rumbles and grumbles about cars not meeting period specifications and homologation forms, and there have always been rumours – true or otherwise – about special engines being developed and fitted for certain high-profile events. Against the backdrop of ever increasing costs and the desire to extract greater performance from period cars, Motor Racing Legends, Masters Historic Racing and Goodwood have come together to make a stand.

The plan – which is being spearheaded by racer and enthusiast Shaun Lynn, who acquired Motor Racing Legends last year and has now added the Historic Racing Drivers Club to his portfolio (see News) – is to work with owners, preparers and engine builders to get every car back in line with period specifications and homologation, as well as ensure that the historic technical passports issued to each car by the FIA are in place. The plan has the support of Roger Wills, chair of the historic committee of Motorsport UK, and a UK voice at FIA level within historic racing.

Lynn recognises that this will not be the work of a moment and will take a lot of effort by the three prominent promoters, working collaboratively with preparers and engine builders to get car specifications back to where they should be across a wide array of categories.

The ambition is to ensure that historic racing is fair, competitive and true to its origins, while balancing performance, reliability and cost control. Lynn is eager to develop a sustainable and equitable environment, and he should be applauded for the effort that's being made on this often thorny subject. These are entirely laudable ambitions.

How widespread the problem is depends upon who you speak to. But clearly there are – or have been – cars within historic motorsport that have, at least, pushed the envelope. It may be a case of pushing the envelope just a little too far or tearing it up completely. Not only does this drive the cost up for everyone involved, but it also deters those who cannot, or do not wish to, compete at that level and also means some of the most original cars are not coming out to race anymore.

Lynn believes that in the quest for victory there are some who have gone over the limit, and he is resolute that it now has to stop. Interestingly, Peter Auto – one of the biggest historic race promoters in Europe – is making similar moves.

To be successful, the concept will need to embrace and engage owners, preparers and engine builders, and it is engines that will probably occupy the greatest time and effort. Paddock gossip talks of bigger capacity motors than used originally and special high-revving engines designed to deliver greater performance.

To make sure that cars can be checked and monitored effectively at events, MRL is significantly developing its technical team for the coming year and will soon appoint a dedicated technical regulations manager. More scrutineers with more equipment will be on the ground at each event, and a portable rolling road and engine capacity checking equipment are some of the new tools that they will have at their disposal.

The response from the industry has been generally positive, with many recognising the need to rein in the most extreme developments. As long-standing racer and team owner Gary Pearson says: "It needs to be done. It's getting more expensive. It's a difficult job to draw a line in the sand, but even more difficult to move it back five years. But I'm fully onside."

Lynn acknowledges that it will only succeed with the cooperation of the preparers and engine builders. But, as he rightly points out, pulling back the rev limit on an engine by 1000rpm could double its workable life between rebuilds. Not only will it reduce cost, but it will allow more cars to do more races in a season, rather than be constrained by engine mileage. Andy Wolfe, who prepares a whole series of cars for customers with his Wolfe Manufacturing team, is another who believes that rev limits on engines are an easy and effective way of reining in the biggest excesses.

> ***"To be successful, it will need to embrace and engage owners, preparers and engine builders"***

How the initiative pans out through 2025 will be watched with great interest, but Lynn is adamant that any competitor, preparer or car found to be in deliberate and serious breach of the regulations will be banned until there is evidence that irregularities have been resolved.

It is a bold and ambitious plan to bring historic racing back to where it really should be. Lynn has the backing and the desire to do it and should be applauded by everyone who loves this branch of the sport as, ultimately, it can only be good for historic racing.

Top: after Award win, Fairclough heads into the season full of confidence

Fairclough (left) faces a field of familiar foes in the new GB3 machinery

HITECH
Deagen FAIRCLOUGH
ROKiT

CAN FAIRCLOUGH CONTINUE HIS WINNING STREAK?

He romped to British F4 glory last year and then secured the Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award, but the teenager faces a fresh challenge in GB3 as a radical new car is introduced

STEVE WHITFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

All eyes will be on Deagen Fairclough when the GB3 season begins at Silverstone at the end of April. The 18-year-old displayed unprecedented levels of dominance on his way to the 2024 British Formula 4 crown by winning almost half the races he started, and will be aiming to repeat such commanding performances this year to follow in the footsteps of reigning GB3 champion Louis Sharp in taking back-to-back UK single-seater titles.

A striking new car with some of the brightest young prospects behind the wheel brings plenty of intrigue and unknowns as a new GB3 era begins. But Fairclough has already enjoyed a decorated start to 2025 by scooping the prestigious Silverstone Autosport BRDC Young Driver Award, with both a £200,000 career contribution and a test in an Aston Martin Formula 1 car part of his prize, lifting his confidence further heading into the season.

“It was a privilege to even be in the top-four shootout – it was such an experience and, even if I didn’t win, I would have learned so much from the two days,” he reflects. “To know that I’ve won and I’ve got an F1 test coming up soon and a cash prize is incredible. To join such a long list of fantastic drivers that have won it is a real boost to my confidence, and it shows that I can possibly make it to F1.”

Fairclough remains with Hitech GP for the next step in his career, and is optimistic of fighting at the front in GB3 from the outset, after regularly appearing in the top five during testing. “We’ve come off such a strong season of British F4,” he continues. “We are working on ourselves at the moment. I’m very confident in everyone in the team, all the mechanics and engineers, we all get along really well. We’ll go for that championship win, both teams’ championship and drivers’ championship – we kind of want to dominate.”

GB3’s new Tatuus MSV GB3-025 has matched its looks with performance, with unofficial lap records set on every UK circuit it has visited. The new car is bigger and heavier than its predecessor and, with a revised aero package producing 35% more downforce and the introduction of a Drag Reduction System to aid overtaking, drivers believe it will provide a better learning tool on the ladder towards F1. »

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Ninovic will renew his rivalry with Fairclough, hopeful of a different outcome

Slater should be one to watch with Hillspeed during his cameo GB3 appearances

"I'm really enjoying it and building that confidence up going through high-speed corners with the amount of downforce and aero there is," affirms Fairclough. "Because it's a new car, there's so many things we've been trying out in testing, things we've had to gauge and understand. Everybody is in the same boat trying to learn as much as possible. It's all going smoothly from our end at the moment, and there's so much more development in the car that we're going to learn throughout the season."

Several of Fairclough's F4 rivals are also stepping up to GB3 this year, the most notable of those being Alex Ninovic. Although the Australian finished a distant runner-up to Fairclough last year, he nonetheless impressed during his first season competing in the UK by taking five victories to finish over 80 points clear of the chasing pack. With that experience banked and the benefit of continuity by remaining with Rodin Motorsport, Ninovic looks well placed to give Fairclough a much stronger challenge in GB3, especially if his impressive testing pace is anything to go by.

> "AS IT'S A NEW CAR, EVERYBODY IS IN THE SAME BOAT TRYING TO LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE"

"Coming away from the season with that many wins, and really strong performances, definitely gives me confidence going into this year," says Ninovic. "It helps knowing I've done all these tracks in the UK and learned how to drive in the cold and all the other tricky bits that come with it.

"I found that I didn't have to change too much in my driving style [compared to F4] – it has crossed over quite nicely. It's coming along really well, we've been making really good steps. We've found what works, so that's a positive sign, and we should be able to give a lot more of a fight compared to last year."

His fellow countryman Gianmarco Pradel, a race winner in Italian F4 last year, has also shown pace for Rodin by topping the final day of GB3 testing at Silverstone, while Abbi Pulling will continue as a team-mate to Ninovic from F4 (see p139).

Another driver who looks set to challenge for victory at round one is Fairclough's fellow Young Driver Award finalist Freddie Slater, who dominated Italian F4 last year and has looked relentlessly fast in testing ahead of his partial GB3 campaign with Hillspeed (alongside his main Formula Regional European programme, see p81).

"It's a good experience to be developing a new car with a team like Hillspeed," Slater explains. "It's a good challenge for me to develop myself more as a driver, to be able to develop a car as well. That's the reason why we are doing it and also some experience on track as well."

Elsewhere, a trio of second-year drivers will be hoping to build on their rookie GB3 campaigns by challenging for the title this time around. Will Macintyre, who scored three victories and finished fifth in the standings with Hitech last year, believes his reunion with Elite Motorsport will help him become a more consistent frontrunner.

After winning twice in 2024, Nikita Johnson has exited Velocity Racing Development's stable for Hitech, and the American will also be busy racking up experience in his homeland with a part-time Indy NXT campaign. Another Australian, Patrick Heuzenroeder, is also feeling bullish after enjoying a strong pre-season with Xcel Motorsport, which has joined the GB3 grid this year.

Xcel isn't the only team making its series debut. Fellow British F4 squad Argenti Motorsport is expanding by partnering with single-seater powerhouse Prema, which will provide engineering support.

Alongside new teams, there is a new venue, with the season concluding at Monza. Six of the eight rounds will take place on current F1 circuits (half in Europe), and Fairclough feels that this is a positive direction for the series.

"It's testing, hopefully, for the future," he concludes. "It's everyone's goal to make it to F1, it's been my goal since I was five years old, and I'm so determined to make it to the top. To get the privilege of driving these tracks so early on in my career will really help in the future."

motorsport JOBS

CADILLAC FORMULA 1 TEAM

ELECTRONICS HARDWARE CALIBRATION ENGINEER

Cadillac F1 Team

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Job description:

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Principal Accountabilities:

- Performing calibration and validation of all electronic systems in line with performance requirements.
- Developing calibration procedures and documentation for all hardware systems
- Working closely with the design and development teams to ensure system specifications are met.

Requirements:

- A degree in a relevant discipline (Engineering/Electronics) or similar.
- Experience with the calibration of electronic systems, preferably in the motorsport sector.

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motorsport JOBS

Envision RACING FORMULA E TEAM

PERFORMANCE ENGINEER

Envision Racing

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Performance Engineer – Formula E Team

- This role will sit within the Performance Engineering group to support race events (trackside and/or in Remote Ops), simulator sessions and test days.
- Collaborate with the wider Engineering group to optimise car setup. tyre and driver performance, applying vehicle dynamics principals to maximise on-track performance.
- Configure and calibrate vehicle performance systems to optimise car behaviour and handling,
- Analyse simulation and track data to recommend setup directions via monitoring and interpreting key performance indicators (KPIs) to support engineering decisions.
- Lead and contribute to offline simulations and the development of in-house performance simulation tools using Python, MATLAB, VBA or similar.
- Contribute to future vehicle development through insight gained from performance analysis.
- Deliver clear, data-driven feedback to inform car setup and race strategy decisions.

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motorsport JOBS

LOLA YAMAHA ABT FORMULA E TEAM

SIMULATOR ENGINEER – FORMULA E

Lola Yamaha ABT Formula E Team

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Key Responsibilities

Session Handling:

- Operate and manage the simulator during driver and engineering sessions.
- Prepare and execute simulator sessions for car development and race event preparation.

Modelling:

- Develop and update vehicle models in Simulink.
- Work with Canopy DiL models (beneficial).

Hardware:

- Maintain and upgrade simulator hardware, ensuring reliability.
- Adapt and expand existing hardware (wiring looms, sensors, actuators).

Software:

- Maintain and update simulator software.
- Develop tools and scripts to enhance simulation workflows.
- Work with rFpro for track deployment, machine integration, and session setup.
- Prepare, update, and edit simulator track models.
- Create and maintain track documentation.

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motorsport JOBS

palmer SPORT

EVENT CO-ORDINATOR

MSVR

MotorSport Vision Racing (MSVR) is one of the UK's leading motorsport event organisers, managing a diverse range of championships and race series. Established in 2006 as part of the MotorSport Vision Group, MSVR delivers professionally-run race meetings for competitors of all levels, from entry level series such as Trackday Trophy and Enduro KA, to high-profile international championships including GB3 and GB4.

Responsibilities of the MSVR Event Coordinator:

- Liaising with MSVR clients on pre- and post-event information
- Processing race entries
- Updating and formatting series/championship regulations
- Liaising with circuit management and other MSV departments pre-event for specific requirements
- Liaising with Chief Marshals on their requirements
- Liaising with hotels and restaurants for the senior officials' team
- Preparing and allocating event paperwork, including paddock plans
- Collating content for and proof-reading event programmes
- Managing the on-event administration of MSVR weekend race events, typically in the role of Event Secretary

You will be / have:

- Experience in motorsport or sports organisation
- Able and willing to work a significant number of event weekends, with the ability to travel to Europe, without restriction
- Comprehensive computer skills, including proficiency in Word and Excel

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRESSURE COULD HELP PULLING SHINE

Having secured a funded GB3 drive, Pulling can focus on racing, not finances, this season

The 2024 season was a breakthrough one for Abbi Pulling. Not only did she score a maiden British Formula 4 victory, but a dominant F1 Academy title success earned her a prize GB3 seat with Rodin Motorsport, and the 22-year-old is relishing that chance to take another step up the ladder.

"I've been in F4 for a few years longer than I wanted, so it's really nice to make that jump after winning F1 Academy and getting that prize," she acknowledges. "If it wasn't for that I wouldn't be here."

Pulling scored nine wins and stood on the podium after every race on her way to the F1 Academy crown, and believes maintaining last year's approach, while feeling less pressure, can help her impress in GB3.

> "IT'S NO SECRET I'VE ALWAYS HAD FINANCIAL PRESSURE, IT'S ALWAYS BEEN IN MY MIND"

"It was a pivotal year for me," she explains. "I felt like it's always been there, it's just been extracting it. I put a lot of last year's success down to mindset, and I'm going to try and go into this year with a similar mindset, though more open in the sense that there's less pressure. I absolutely had to win last year.

"This year, whether I have to or not, I want to do well myself and I know that I'm capable of it. It's just carrying that momentum and success from last year."

After seeing a promising British F4 season cut short due to lack of funding in 2021, Pulling has experienced the struggles of trying to raise a budget. Thanks to the F1 Academy prize, being able to solely focus on her driving this year should be of benefit.

"It's no secret I've always had financial pressure," she relates. "It's been something that I've always had – not even at the back of my mind, pretty much at the forefront of it. It does hinder you because, if you have an off, it can add up and be expensive. This year I don't have any real big financial pressures, which I hope helps me get the most out of the car and myself. I'm so privileged to be in this position, so it's keeping that performance going and showing why I deserve to be here."

Pulling has outlined some clear aims for the season ahead following positive testing performances. "Every time we go out we're constantly learning," she explains. "Even the tyre compound is new, so we're learning a lot with that. I'm looking forward to progressing and hopefully having a good first few races. My target would be to finish in the top six. I think, if I've done that, that's a really great job. I believe in myself and the team that we can achieve some great things. It's just putting it together, being consistent and racking up points."

GB3 2025 CALENDAR

DATE	VENUE
26-27 April	**Silverstone GP**
17-18 May	**Zandvoort**
31 May-1 June	**Spa**
5-6 July	**Hungaroring**
2-3 August	**Silverstone GP**
23-24 August	**Brands Hatch GP**
4-5 October	**Donington Park GP**
18-19 October	**Monza**

THE SUPPORTING STARS TO WATCH

The new TOCA Junior series may not be happening, but there are plenty of other intriguing battles set to play out on the BTCC's undercard this year

STEPHEN LICKORISH

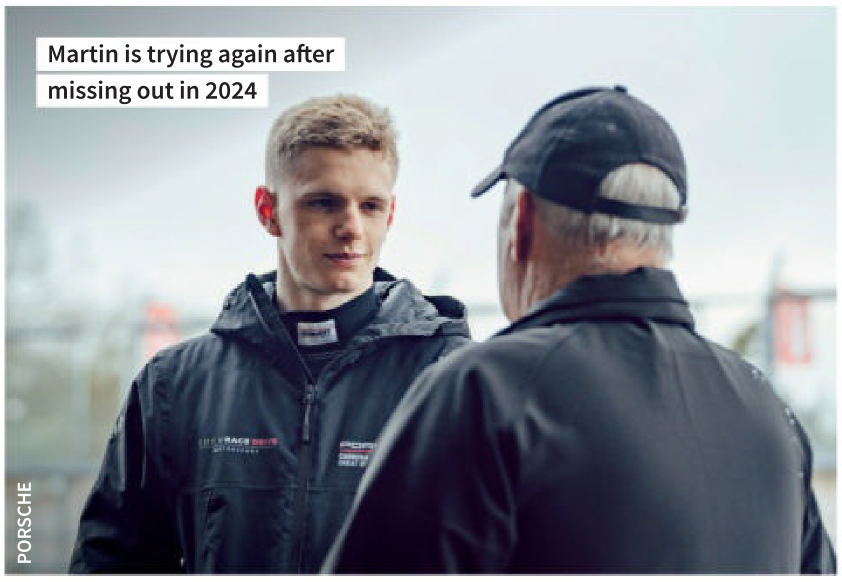
PORSCHE

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

It may be six months ago now, but mention last season's Porsche Carrera Cup GB finale at Brands Hatch to George Gamble and he cannot help but smile. His storming drive in tricky wet conditions netted him the title after a campaign full of twists and turns – and now Gamble wants more success. "That last race, apparently they play it at all the Porsche dealer networks now," he enthuses. "A friend of mine works at the Leicester dealership and he says they play it at every seminar, which is really cool. I certainly won't be forgetting it in a hurry."

Gamble is continuing with the Century Motorsport squad with the number 1 on the side of his Porsche and is seeking to pick up where he left off. "It's a lot more natural than last year when I was learning a new car and a new team," says the former British Touring Car racer. "Everyone at Century is great, so it's really nice to be back with them and have another stab at it."

But it's not just Gamble having another attempt; so too is one of his key 2024 rivals: Will Martin. He only agreed a deal with the new Eden Motorsport squad on the eve of the campaign but marched into the early standings lead. Spinning out of the Brands finale derailed his bid and he is determined to make amends. "In the heat of the moment, it's hard to make a good decision so we've all learned from last year and I think this year will be good," reckons Martin. "Motorsport is 90% disappointment and 10% enjoyment! We'll just have a fun year, enjoy ourselves and any results are a bonus."


Martin is trying again after missing out in 2024

PORSCHE

Achieving strong results will not be easy because there are plenty of other notable contenders. Formula Ford star Andrew Rackstraw has joined Gamble at Century for his sophomore season, while Porsche GB Junior James Wallis (JTR) will be attempting to continue the remarkable run of scholars clinching Carrera Cup championships.

Meanwhile, the top three from the Sprint Challenge are jumping into the Carrera Cup and Seb Hopkins, Will Jenkins (both Team Parker) and Max Coates (Graves Motorsport) will be resuming their Cayman rivalry as another intriguing subplot. "We want to win a championship, that's why we're here, but I'm not naive enough to think we can rock up and do that straight away," says Coates, who is carrying the famous Duckhams colours.

PORSCHE SPRINT CHALLENGE GB

Trice views 2025 as a clean slate after compromised 2024 prep

PORSCHE

Some of the numbers surrounding the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB shunt suffered by Toby Trice at Silverstone in 2023 are quite staggering. The series frontrunner smashed head-on into the Copse barriers at 135mph, creating a colossal 53*g* impact. Although he had no broken bones, Trice was inevitably ruled out of the Brands Hatch finale (for which he would have been in title contention without the incident) and it resulted in a long recovery – one that compromised last season, when he agreed a late deal with new squad Clean Racing.

"I didn't get to train over the winter because I was injured from the accident, but it took a good two to three weekends of racing before I really got Toby back," he admits. "It was an incredible, strange and scary experience but that's all behind me now.

"Last year we signed the deal really late in the day – Friday practice was our first drive in the RS [upgraded Cayman model]. This season, however, me and my sponsors have drummed together with a proper pre-season plan, which is brilliant – I've never had that luxury before pre-season testing. I'm coming with a lot of fitness behind me. I've been working hard over the winter, a fresh head and all focused on the outright title."

Trice is keen to hit the ground running after failing to score a podium last year on his way to seventh in the table. And, though many of the 2024 frontrunners have moved on, two-time race winner Joe Marshall has switched to Team Parker Racing and will pose a major threat. Then there is triple Mini Challenge conqueror Dan Zelos, who has entered the world of rear-wheel drive for the first time.

"My driving style will have to change massively in these cars," explains the Graves Motorsport newcomer. "There's a lot more power, the engine's behind me rather than in front and the weight distribution is completely different. So I'm not expecting to light up the times straight away, but we're here to learn – it's the first day at school again."

Given the manner in which Zelos rapidly got up to speed during his British Touring Car cameo last year, it's unlikely to be long before he is challenging Trice, Marshall *et al* at the front.

Trice is aiming to be front and centre of Cayman fight

PORSCHE

BRITISH FORMULA 4

Robinson is highest-placed 2024 driver to continue

JEP
F4 BRITISH
ReKiT
1
PIRELLI
Wera

It is inevitable with any junior single-seater championship that there will be a high turnover of drivers from one year to the next as the aspiring racers seek to rapidly climb the ladder. But, even with that in mind, the number of teenagers opting to progress from British Formula 4 is remarkable. Of the top 10 in last year's final standings, an incredible seven are set to tackle GB3 this season, leaving just three now aiming for sophomore success in F4.

Naturally, given the general lack of experience across the grid, this trio head into the campaign among the favourites. The highest-placed of those continuing is Leo Robinson, who was sixth in 2024 and will be seeking to replicate what Deagen Fairclough managed last year in switching from JHR to Hitech and winning the title. Among his team-mates are Thomas Bearman – the younger brother of Haas F1 racer Ollie made a couple of appearances at the end of last season – and Irish Red Bull Junior Fionn McLaughlin.

Robinson finished two places ahead of Martin Molnar in the 2024 table, and the Hungarian is staying with Virtuosi for a second season. His rate of improvement during 2024 was recognised with the inaugural Jake Cook Memorial Award – as voted by team bosses – and he will be aiming to convert that progression into a title bid. Rounding out the triumvirate is Rowan Campbell-Pilling, who was 10th last year with Argenti and has now moved to JHR.

But the driver with past British F4 experience who should arguably be watched most closely is Jimmy Piszcyk at Rodin Motorsport. He was fifth in 2023 with Hitech before returning to his native Australia last year and dominating the country's revived F4 series. Piszcyk will now seek to continue that momentum into this year, where among his team-mates will be F1 Academy competitor Ella Lloyd (another of the 2024 cohort remaining).

Also heading into the year with momentum is Ethan Jeff-Hall. He won the Ginetta Junior and World Karting titles in 2024 and, having joined Mercedes' books, is among Argenti's F4 line-up. Fellow Ginetta aces Henry Joslyn (Fortec) and Chase Fernandez (Xcel) could also be ones to watch in what promises to be an intriguing campaign full of new faces.

After spending a year in Australia, Piszcyk is now back with Rodin

JEP
93
iocane
RODIN MOTORSPORT
Wera

GARY HAWKINS

Selby is one of four NAPA Mini drivers aiming for success

MINI CHALLENGE

There will be a distinctly different feel to the Mini Challenge this year. After six seasons as a regular frontrunner (including claiming three titles), reigning champion Dan Zelos is off to pastures new as he attempts to crack real-wheel-drive sportscars, while runner-up Max Hall has landed a full-time British Touring Car drive that has again proven elusive for his old Excelr8 team-mate.

And it's not just on the driving front where there are changes – long-time promoter Antony Williams has departed and coordinator Rhea Beauchamp and clerk of the course Luke Caudle are now in charge.

But there are still some familiar features for the start of this new era. The NAPA Racing Minis that have regularly run at the front in recent seasons are back and, this time, there are four of them. Jamie Osborne once again spearheads the team's line-up and will be seeking a full title bid, having failed to win en route to fourth in last year's standings.

Former Mini 7 Racing Club contender Lewis Selby was a race victor last term and is back for another attack, while they will be joined by Alex Solley, who has previously acted as a mechanic for the team and was a perennial frontrunner among the Coopers of the Mini Challenge Trophy, and JCW Sport graduate Cameron Richardson.

Tom Ovenden is set to lead the charge of Excelr8, the team that has powered the champion in all but one of the five seasons since the Minis joined the BTCC bill. Ovenden, who won the Cooper crown in 2023, finished sixth in last season's table and will be looking to improve on that this time around.

Among the new entrants so far confirmed, arguably the most intriguing is two-time Civic Cup champion Max Edmundson. He has defeated a cast of star names to land his Honda success and will now be trying his hand at a new challenge as the Pro Alloys Racing squad also makes its series debut. Reigning Cooper title winner Harry Hickton also graduates to JCWs with Mannpower Motorsport.

Elsewhere, the JCW Sport class was a new 2024 addition – designed to bridge the performance and budget gap between the JCWs and the Coopers – and is set to feature an expanded entry. Among those to have signed up is Fiesta ST240 Challenge frontrunner Henry Howarth (Jamsport).

Cooper champion Hickton steps up to JCWs

SURPRISING SECRETS OF THE 'SUPERFESTA'

Sam Daffin's Ford Fiesta instantly attracts attention with its big wing and wide wheel arches, but the changes he's made over 500 hours of work extend far deeper

MARK PAULSON

PHOTOGRAPHY **STEVE JONES**

Even from a quick glance at Sam Daffin's Ford Fiesta, it's obvious that this is no ordinary Mk5. A rear wing, diffuser, wide wheel arches and side skirts are just some of the Worcestershire racer's tweaks.

But it's not until exploring the Fiesta's mechanics that the feat of engineering really becomes clear. Not only has the standard 1.4-litre Zetec engine been transplanted with a 312bhp (turned down from 447bhp!) 1600cc EcoBoost turbo, but the humble hatchback has also been converted to rear-wheel-drive configuration.

"We got to the point where we couldn't make the front-wheel-drive car any quicker," explains Daffin, who built the Fiesta for the Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Blue Oval Saloon Series, in which his previous FWD version won consecutive class titles in 2022-23. "It was too powerful for going through the front wheels really. We couldn't get it to do what we wanted so we had to go rear-wheel drive. The sensible choice was to build a Mk1 or Mk2 Escort. But I hadn't got the budget for that."

Both shells were originally prepared for the British Touring Car-supporting Ford Fiesta Challenge – not that Daffin realised when he built his first SuperFesta, as a rival christened it. "We were at Spa, and there was a guy running some modern Fiestas who came over and went, 'This is an ex-Fiesta Challenge car. If you open the driver's door, it's got a chassis number stamped in the cage,'" he recalls. "He said there were only two cars ever stamped in the cage and they were the ones done in-house by Ford Motorsport."

> *"It's a very similar set-up to what we used to build. It's 40mm longer than a Capri in the wheelbase but it's very similarly balanced"*

Restoring his original chassis to the specification in which future BTCC top dog Gordon Shedden took the 2000 title is a future aspiration. But first, with an Escort out of reach, Daffin created SuperFesta Mk2. Starting from what he knew, he snapped up another ex-Challenge car ahead of a busy winter. "We bought it at the end of October '23 and we tested in February '24," he reveals. "We spent probably 500 hours building it. It was pretty much all myself and a couple of mates gave me a hand here and there."

In addition to familiar self-fabricated aero devices and engine, in went an Atlas axle from a Ford Capri and a one-off propshaft. Front struts along with self-built six-link and coilover rear suspension complete a set-up akin to a Capri or Escort: Daffin made use of the knowledge he'd learned building Capris for the likes of Richard Austin and Henry Mann alongside father Alan, who worked with Ted Grace on Stuart Graham's cars in period.

"It's a very similar set-up underneath to what we used to build," Daffin confirms. "It's 40mm longer than a Capri in the wheelbase but it's very similarly balanced. As soon as we put it on track it was like, 'Actually, this is going to come right.' There were a few handling issues; it felt good but it wasn't where we wanted it to be."

Development over the past winter focused on suspension geometry. A motorsport brains trust in Pershore – perhaps best known as home to Team Dynamics for many years – allowed Daffin to bounce ideas around. "I'm quite lucky where we're situated," says the 34-year-old. "There's been motorsport there since the '60s, proper little cottage engineering shops. So you can go round and go, 'I've got an idea: what I need is to make that fit, and I think we can do it like this.' They'll look at it and go, 'Yeah, that'll work,' or 'I can see where you're going, but you need to do it this way.'"

The car ran a manual Getrag gearbox last year. But, having chomped through clutches, Daffin took advantage of the BOSS regulations to swap it for a seemingly curious choice. "We've now put an 8HP ZF automatic in," he smiles, before explaining: "Because it's turboed, it's not allowed to be sequential, but it's allowed to be automatic. Modern automatics change gear quite quickly... It's all a little bit different!"

Uncertainty around the supply of slicks led Daffin to revert to treaded tyres and the 2.9-litre (or equivalent for forced induction) Class C, from where he hopes to mount a title challenge. "We've managed to win the class three years on the bounce," he points out. "It'd be nice to win the overall championship with it.

"Ultimately, as and when funds allow, it would be nice to transfer it all into a Capri or something like that. I'd like to build a '74-spec car but with all the modern running gear in it. I enjoy the engineering side as much if not more than driving the thing."

Daffin has converted his Fiesta to rear-wheel drive to cope with extra power

SuperFesta is powered by an EcoBoost turbo engine that produces 312bhp

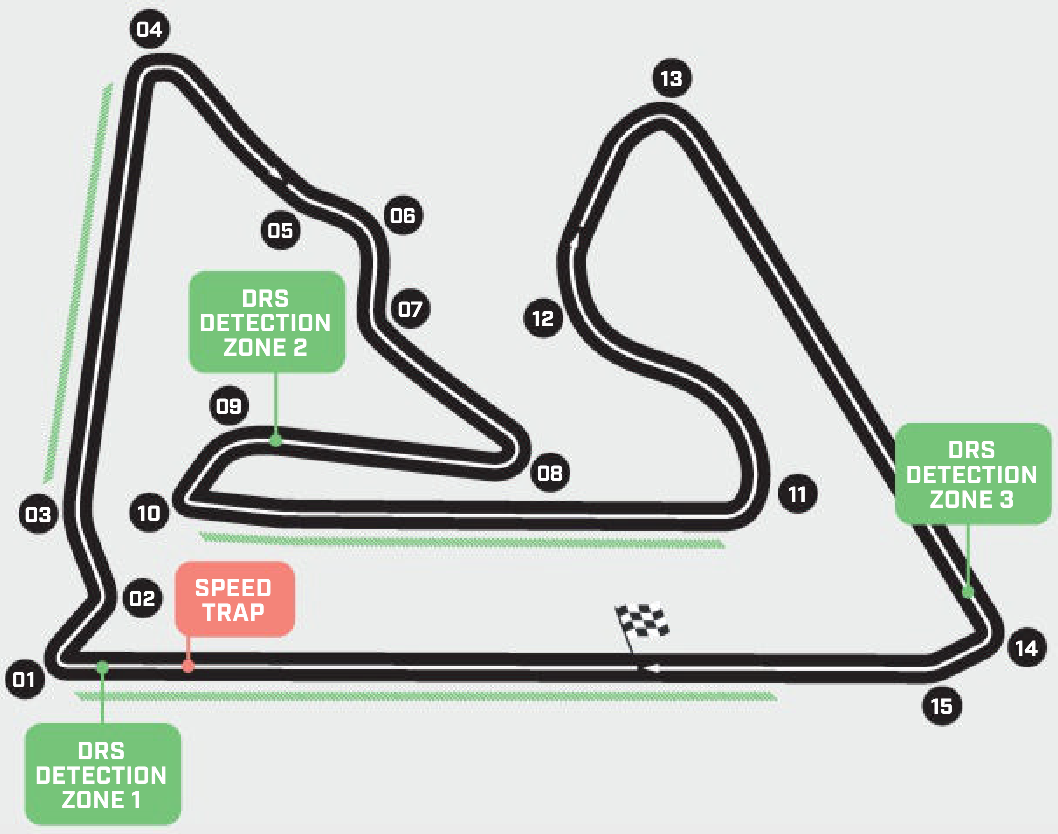
The Worcestershire racer and his father Alan are used to working on Ford Capris

BTCC
Donington in the rain in April, and someone about to shunt. Must be the start of the BTCC season!

JEP

BAHRAIN GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 4



HERE COMES BAHRAIN AGAIN

After an uncharacteristically cool and breezy three-day stay in the desert in February, F1 should find Bahrain under slightly warmer climes when the circus makes its return.

The Sakhir venue was formerly derided for its excess of angular corners, and its one-and-done 'endurance circuit' that produced a pretty turgid race in 2010, but the switch to a night-time race coincided with it producing much more intriguing encounters. As such, it's become a modern-day calendar staple. There's a good mix of corners too; fast and flowing sections separated by tight corners, and the likes of Turn 1 and Turn 4 encourage those on the offence to try DRS-assisted overtakes, and those in defence to cannily preserve positions through switchback moves – plus a few liberties.

Expect plenty of lock-ups at the difficult Turns 9/10 transition, particularly as the car unloads through the left-hander under braking, and more than a few track-limits violations at the exit of Turn 4. Tyre degradation should be high; the greywacke asphalt is pretty much unchanged from the circuit's first outing in 2004, and the roughness should chafe at even the hardest grades of Pirelli rubber.

Kubica's only F1 pole came here in 2008

SCHLEGELMILCH/GETTYIMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Sakhir
First GP	2004
GPs held	21
Circuit length	3.363 miles
Number of laps	57
Race distance	191.683 miles
Race lap record	1m31.447s Pedro de la Rosa (2005)
Pole lap record	1m27.264s Lewis Hamilton (2020)
Most wins	Lewis Hamilton **5**
Most poles	Sebastian Vettel, Lewis Hamilton & Max Verstappen **3**
Most starts	Kimi Raikkonen, Fernando Alonso & Lewis Hamilton **17**

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 11 April	
Practice 1	1230-1330
Practice 2	1600-1700
Saturday 12 April	
Practice 3	1330-1430
Qualifying	1700-1800
Sunday 13 April	
Race	1600

WHERE TO WATCH

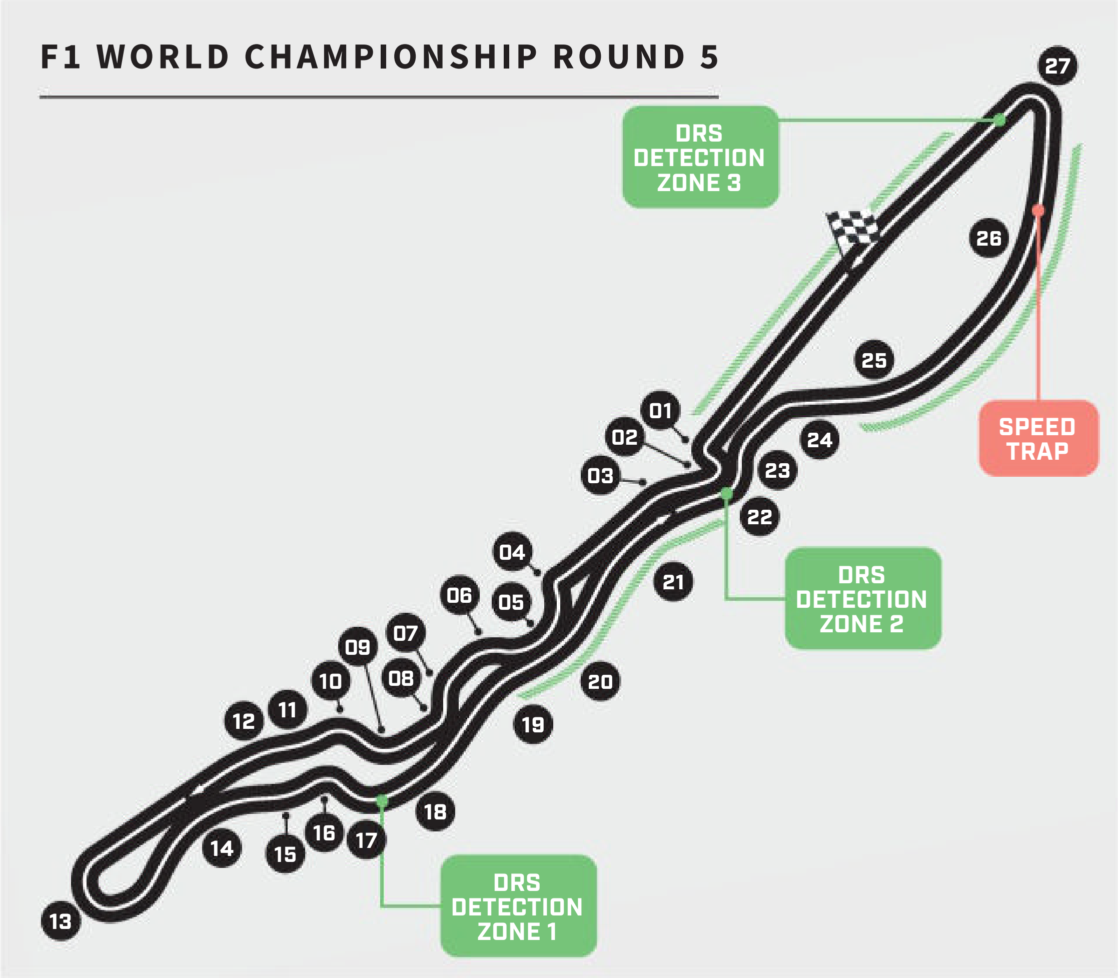
Live coverage	Sky Sports F1

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2023	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2022	**Charles Leclerc**	Ferrari
2021	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2020	**Sergio Perez**	Racing Point
2020	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2019	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2018	**Sebastian Vettel**	Ferrari
2017	**Sebastian Vettel**	Ferrari
2016	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes

SAUDI ARABIAN GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 5



ARABIAN KNIGHTS AMID MYRIAD LIGHTS

With 27 official corners, the Jeddah Corniche Circuit may look like the side-on image of a bent spoon, but it's a venue that has captured the drivers' imaginations – for better or for worse.

The consensus among them is that it's challenging and enjoyable, but they're also aware of the kick that the close walls and blind corners can deliver. Even Max Verstappen once suggested that it might be a little bit dangerous. It's also difficult to find overtaking spots; Turn 1 is the obvious main contender here. Then the circuit tends to promote follow-the-leader racing through a series of back-and-forth corners before the long-radius hairpin at the bottom of the track.

Then there's the cat-and-mouse game that the DRS zone into the final corner promotes; in 2022, Verstappen and Charles Leclerc did not want to lead into the final corner, lest the other gain DRS on the run to Turn 1. There's a third DRS zone between Turns 19 and 22, albeit one more seldom used for overtakes. Although not particularly popular in F1's fandom given Saudi Arabia's controversies, the circuit at least punishes errors – and yet, rewards risk.

Bearman's ad hoc 2024 debut will be a pub quiz question for many years…

ALONSO/GETTY IMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Jeddah
First GP	2021
GPs held	4
Circuit length	3.836 miles
Number of laps	50
Race distance	191.817 miles
Race lap record	1m30.734s Lewis Hamilton (2021)
Pole lap record	1m27.472s Max Verstappen (2024)
Most wins	Max Verstappen **2**
Most poles	Sergio Perez **2**
Most starts	Verstappen, Norris, Gasly, Perez, Alonso, Leclerc, Stroll, Ocon, Hamilton, Russell & Bottas **4**

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 18 April	
Practice 1	1430-1530
Practice 2	1800-1900
Saturday 19 April	
Practice 3	1430-1530
Qualifying	1800-1900
Sunday 20 April	
Race	1800

WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1

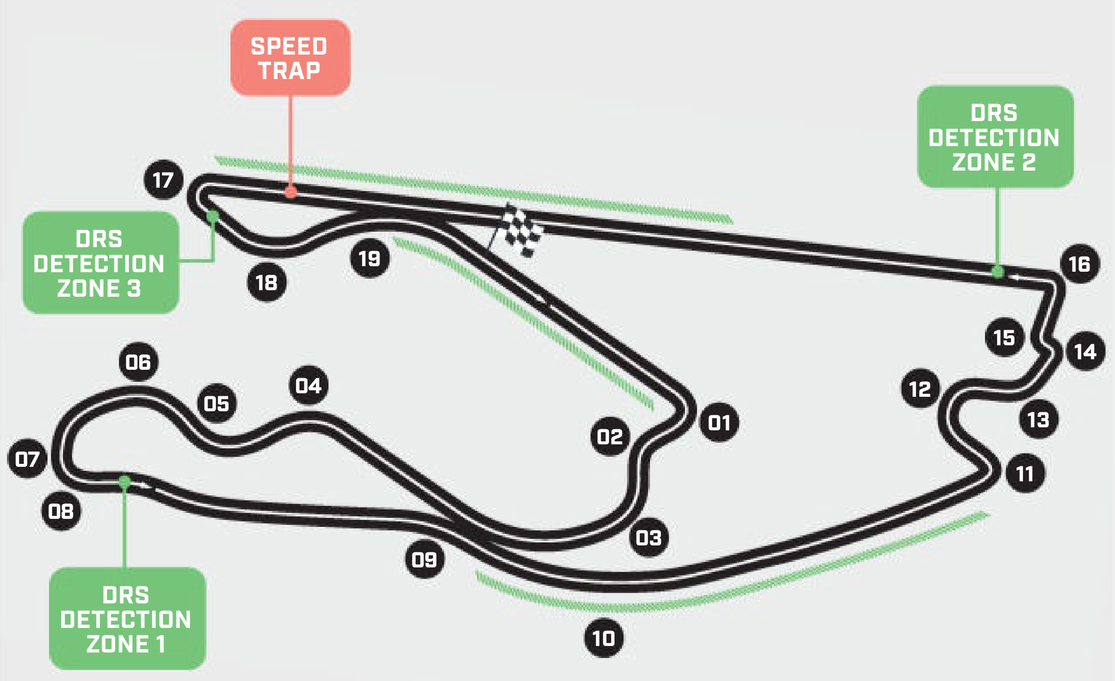
PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2023	**Sergio Perez**	Red Bull
2022	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2021	**Lewis Hamilton** (below)	Mercedes

ETHERINGTON/GETTY IMAGES

MIAMI GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 6



MIAMI SOUND MACHINES LET IT LOOSE

The circuit around the Miami Dolphins' Hard Rock Stadium was introduced to F1's calendar in 2022 as the championship had finally cracked America, and became a figure of ridicule. Overpriced food (albeit largely confined to the hoity-toityest of hospitality) and fake marinas were considered emblematic of F1 pricing out its viewership heartland, and the complex of corners from Turns 11 to 16 to avoid an underpass are still understandably viewed as clumsy.

But there's some genuine challenge for the drivers, particularly in the first sector, and the DRS zones are surprisingly underpowered despite the long straights' climax into low-speed corners. The first two races in Miami Gardens were little more than Red Bull benefit concerts, and the third was set to go that way until the safety car's timing allowed Lando Norris to break his duck in 2024.

Although symbolic of excess, there are also some innovative features to Miami's off-track set-up; the paddock, for example, is located on the football field, and other operational facets located within the bowels of the stadium. As for the circuit itself, it's by no means the best on the calendar… but it's capable of delivering a good race.

F1 in the US spring used to mean Long Beach. Here Jody Scheckter leads in 1977

HUTSON/GETTY IMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Miami
First GP	2022
GPs held	3
Circuit length	3.363 miles
Number of laps	57
Race distance	191.683 miles
Race lap record	1m29.708s Max Verstappen (2023)
Pole lap record	1m26.841s Sergio Perez (2023)
Most wins	Max Verstappen **2**
Most poles	Charles Leclerc, Sergio Perez & Max Verstappen **1**
Most starts	16 drivers **1**

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 2 May	
Practice	1730-1830
Sprint qualifying	2130-2214
Saturday 3 May	
Sprint	1700-1800
Qualifying	2100-2200
Sunday 4 May	
Race	2100

WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Lando Norris**	McLaren
2023	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2022	**Max Verstappen** (below)	Red Bull

DUNBAR/GETTY IMAGES

WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 2/8
Imola, Italy
20 April

The Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari lies on the edge of the town of Imola, just across the Santerno river, and is a beautiful place to watch racing cars – especially when the racing cars are the Le Mans Hypercar and LMGT3 machinery of the World Endurance Championship.

This is where the European leg of the season begins after the opener in Qatar. Ferrari was the dominant marque in the Middle East, with Antonio Fuoco, Miguel Molina and Nicklas Nielsen leading home a 1-2-3 for the 499P, so expect a very enthusiastic crowd at the circuit that bears the founder's name. The Prancing Horse will also be aiming to avenge its Imola strategy catastrophe of last year.

If you're looking for a last-minute spring break, the 6 Hours of Imola is the perfect solution, with the circuit situated just a 40-minute blast down the *autostrada* from the airport in Bologna.

Winning Toyota bounced back from Variante Alta slip in last year's race

JEP/WEC

Evans leads the way in the WRC standings

McKLEIN

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 4/14
Rally Islas Canarias
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
24-27 April

Spain is back on the World Rally Championship calendar for the first time since 2022. But, rather than heading for the traditional heartland of Catalonia, the circus is heading out into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Morocco as the Canary Islands take their bow in the series.

Elfyn Evans is riding the crest of a wave following his victory last time out on the Safari Rally to follow his snowy Swedish success, and it's the Welsh Toyota driver who sits atop the points standings by a comfortable margin. Hyundai new boy Adrien Fourmaux could be a threat – he won the rally in 2020 in its ERC days.

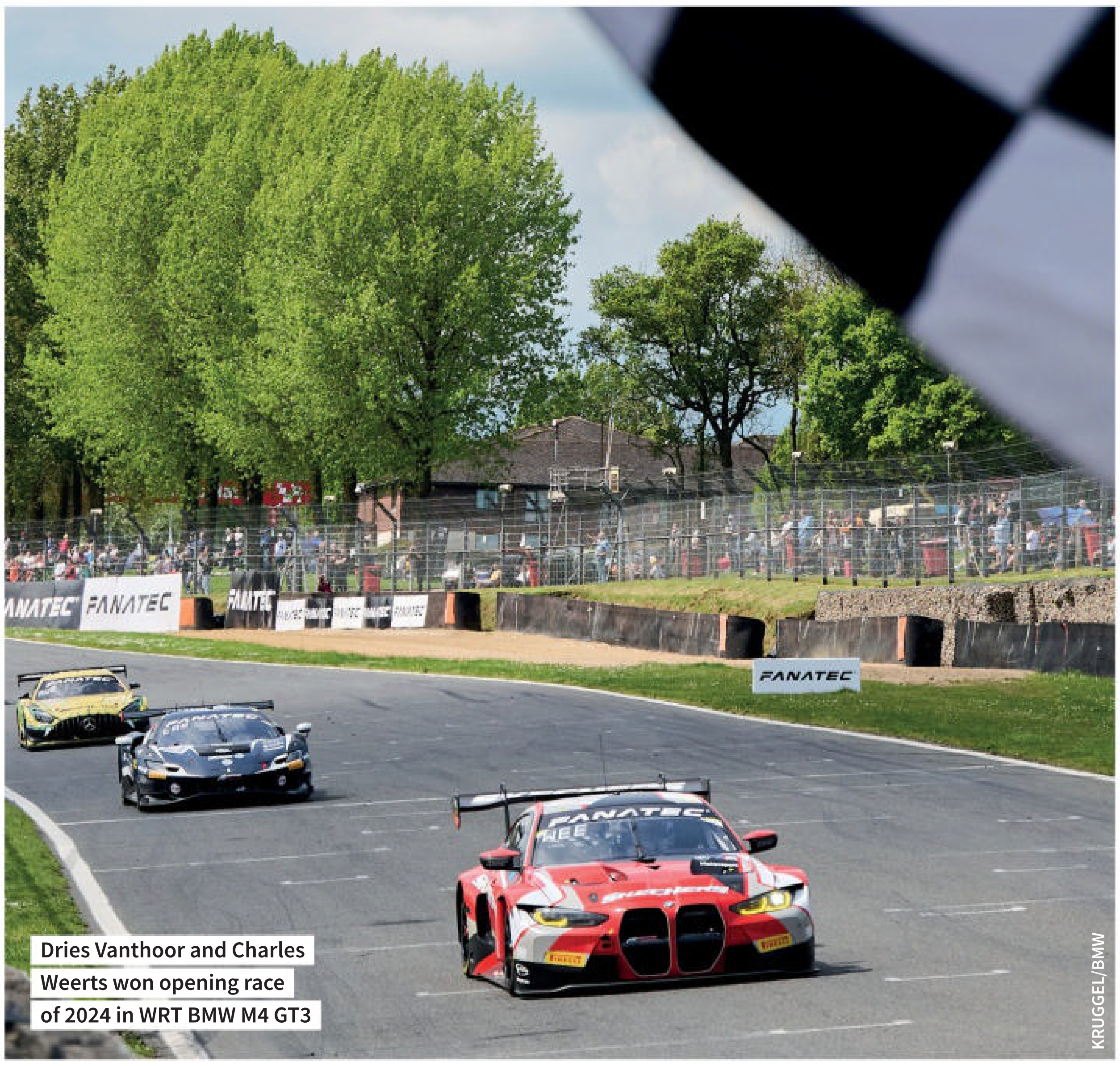
BAGNALL/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA E

Round 4/10
Homestead, USA
12 April

Round 5/10
Monte Carlo, Monaco
3-4 May

It will be two months since the previous round in Jeddah by the time the Formula E paddock assembles for a round on the 'roval' of former Indycar and current NASCAR venue Homestead-Miami Speedway. But it's the glamour event in Monaco that will get European aficionados of electric single-seater racing excited. For the first time, Monte Carlo becomes the host of a double-header round. Mitch Evans won the event last year, and he and the Jaguar team need to target big strides up the 2024-25 points table.



Dries Vanthoor and Charles Weerts won opening race of 2024 in WRT BMW M4 GT3

KRUGGEL/BMW

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE SPRINT CUP

Round 1/5
Brands Hatch, UK
4 May

There are few better ways to while away a – hopefully sunny – Sunday in May than by watching a grid of some of the best GT3 professionals in the world blasting their way around the leafy glades of the Brands Hatch Grand Prix circuit. The track is a regular starting point for the Sprint Cup segment of the GT World Challenge Europe, with a pair of one-hour races scheduled. Racing can be processional here, but the setting more than mitigates that. And make sure you arrive early, because the first GTWCE instalment beings at 11am.

International support comes from the McLaren Trophy Europe and, this being Brands, there is also some good old-fashioned British club racing on the card. A packed field of Minis will fight it out in the Miglia and Se7en classes, while the Equipe Libre mini-enduro, which follows straight after the second GTWCE race, brings pre-1966 GT action to entertain.

Smaller Group 1 saloons now get a separate race away from the heavy metal

J BLOXHAM/GETTY IMAGES

GOODWOOD MEMBERS' MEETING

Goodwood BARC
82nd Members' Meeting
12-13 April

Alongside the usual mix of historic races – which this year includes the new Win Percy Trophy for smaller-engined Group 1 touring cars – there are some special demonstrations planned down in Sussex. The 40th anniversary of Ayrton Senna's maiden Formula 1 victory is being celebrated, with Bruno Senna taking to the track in his uncle's Lotus 97T from 1985. Much more modern machinery will also be in action, as Jota's latest Cadillac is set to become the first current World Endurance Championship Hypercar to lap Goodwood at high speed to commemorate the team's 25th birthday. Further excitement is planned in the form of a special GT3 shootout.

JEP

DONINGTON PARK TOCA

BTCC, British F4, Carrera Cup GB, Mini Challenge, Porsche Sprint Challenge GB
26-27 April

UK motorsport's flagship series begins its 68th season with what, at the time of publication, looks set to be a very strong 24-car grid. Just ensure you bring suitable footwear if it's wet, because 12 months ago Donington turned into a total quagmire. Once racing finally got under way, it appeared that Tom Ingram was looking good for the crown with two wins, but little did we know what would follow… You can read our full BTCC preview from p113, while the support acts are highlighted on p140.

GRUPPE C GMBH/ADAC MOTORSPORT

DTM 2025 breaks cover at Oschersleben opener...

FORMULA 2

Round 2/14
Sakhir, Bahrain
12-13 April

Round 3/14
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
19-20 April

FORMULA 3

Round 2/10
Sakhir, Bahrain
12-13 April

INDYCAR

Round 3/16
Long Beach, USA
13 April

Round 4/16
Barber Motorsports Park, USA
4 May

IMSA SPORTSCAR

Round 3/11
Long Beach, USA
12 April

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE ENDURANCE CUP

Round 1/5
Paul Ricard, France
13 April

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Round 3/13
Taupo, New Zealand
12-13 April

SUPER GT

Round 1/8
Okayama, Japan
13 April

Round 2/8
Fuji, Japan
4 May

NASCAR CUP

Round 9/36
Bristol, USA
13 April

Round 10/36
Talladega, USA
27 April

Round 11/36
Texas Motor Speedway, USA
4 May

SUPER FORMULA

Round 2/7
Motegi, Japan
19-20 April

F1 ACADEMY

Round 2/7
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
19-20 April

Round 3/7
Miami, USA
3-4 May

DTM

Round 1/8
Oschersleben, Germany
26-27 April

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

Round 2/6
Paul Ricard, France
4 May

TCR WORLD TOUR

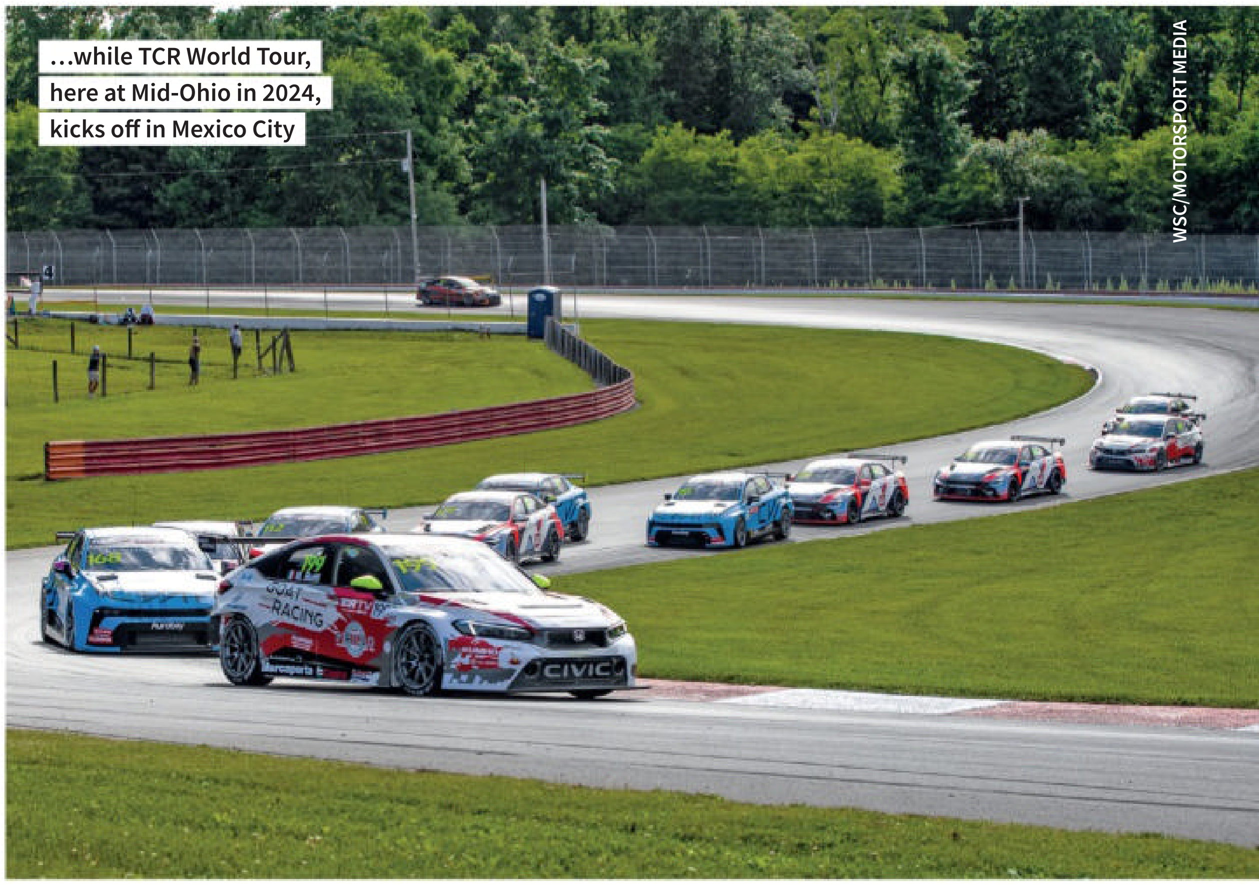
Round 1/8
Mexico City, Mexico
2-3 May

INDY NXT

Round 2/12
Barber Motorsports Park, USA
4 May

FORMULA REGIONAL EUROPEAN

Round 1/10
Misano, Italy
3-4 May


WSC/MOTORSPORT MEDIA

...while TCR World Tour, here at Mid-Ohio in 2024, kicks off in Mexico City

OULTON PARK BARC

Caterham Graduates, Sports/Saloons, Hyundai Coupes, Classic Formula Libre
12 April

CARLISLE STAGES

British Rally Championship **Round 2/6**
12 April

SNETTERTON BARC

Caterhams (7 UK, 310R, 270R, Roadsport), Mini Challenge Trophy, MGOC
12-13 April

BRANDS HATCH BRSCC

Mazda MX-5s (Championship, SuperCup, Clubman), Fun Cup, Super Classic FF1600, Classic VWs/Metros, ClubSport Trophy
12-13 April

DONINGTON PARK CSCC

Magnificent 7s, Tin Tops/Puma Cup, New Millennium/Turbo Tin Tops, Modern/Future Classics, Slicks Series, Midgets/Sprites, MG Trophy/Jaguars, BMWs, Morgans/Special Saloons & Modsports, Swinging 60s, Classic K/Jaguar Challenge
12-13 April

SANTA POD

British Drag Racing Championship **Round 1/6**
18-20 April

OULTON PARK BRSCC

Audi TTs, Pro-Sports Sprint, MG Cockshoot, Production Cup, SuperSport Endurance
19 April

CADWELL PARK MSVR

Equipe Classic Racing (Libre, GTS, Formula Libre, MG Cup, 70s, 50s, Pre 63)
19 April

SILVERSTONE MSVR

Porsche Club, Boxsters, Bernie's V8s, Pickups, Focus Cup, Production GTIs, Sports 2000, Clubmans, Allcomers
19-20 April

Castle Combe season gets going, and Formula Ford action is bound to be hot

STEVE JONES

BRANDS HATCH BARC

Trucks, Caterham Academy, CTCRC (Pre-'66, Pre-'83, Pre-'93, Pre-'03, BOSS, Classic Thunder), Junior Saloons, Civic Cup, Track Action
19-20 April

LYDDEN HILL

British Rallycross Championship **Round 1/6**
19-20 April

CASTLE COMBE CCRC

CCRC (FF1600, GTs, Hot Hatch, Saloons), 500 OA
21 April

DONINGTON PARK 750MC

Hot Hatch, Locost, Historic 750F, Mighty Minis, Armed Forces, Calm All Porsche
21 April

KIRKISTOWN 500MRCI

FF1600, Formula Vee, Fiestas, Mini Coopers, Libre Saloons, Roadsports, Junior Minis
26 April

OULTON PARK MSVR

Modified Fords, EnduroKa, Bell Sport Challenge
26 April

SILVERSTONE BRSCC

British GT, GB3, GB4, Ginettas (Academy, Junior, Championship)
26-27 April

SNETTERTON HSCC

Guards Trophy, Historic F3, Historic FF1600, Historic FF2000, Historic Modsports/Special Saloons, 70s Road Sports, Pre-'66 Saloons, Griffiths Haig Trophy, Alfas/Italian Intermarque
26-27 April

CROFT 750MC

F1000, Formula Vee, Clio Sport, Ma7das, Sports 1000, Club Enduro, Roadsports
26-27 April

PRESCOTT

British Hillclimb Championship **Round 1/14**
26-27 April

DONINGTON PARK MSVR

Formula Junior, U2TC, Ferrari Club Classic, Pre-War Sports, GT3 Legends, Pre-'63 GT, Pall Mall Cup, Historic Touring Cars, HRDC (Gerry Marshall Trophy, Jack Sears Trophy, Allstars), RAC Woodcote/Stirling Moss Trophy
2-4 May

CRAIGANTLET

British Hillclimb Championship **Round 2/14**
3 May

THRUXTON BARC

Caterhams (310R, 270R, Roadsport, Academy), Junior Saloons, Track Action, Hyundai Coupes
3-4 May

SILVERSTONE BRSCC

C1 Racing Club 24 Hours
3-4 May

CADWELL PARK CTA

Racing Hondas
5 May

AUTOSPORT
RACING
COROLLA

JEP

PODCAST Our new Autosport Racing podcast channel looks ahead to the British Touring Car Championship with returning triple champion Gordon Shedden. The Scot joins host Kevin Turner and our BTCC correspondent Marcus Simmons to talk about his comeback and early impressions of the Speedworks Toyota Corolla he'll race in 2025. autosport.com/podcast

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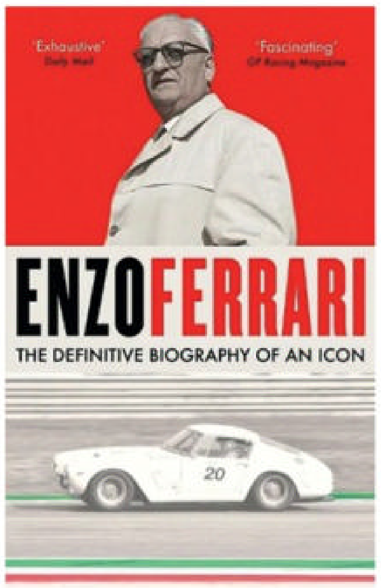
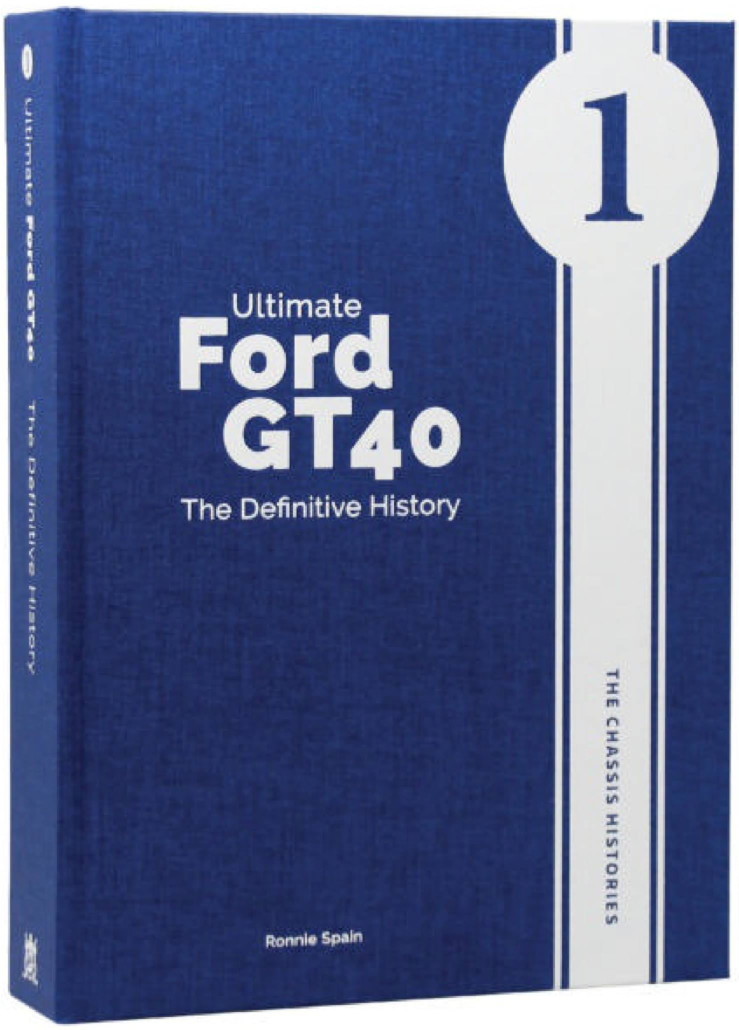

'Exhaustive'
Daily Mail
'Fascinating'
GP Racing Magazine
ENZO FERRARI
THE DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY OF AN ICON
20

ENZO FERRARI: THE DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY OF AN ICON

octopusbooks.co.uk
RRP £12.95

Now in paperback, this addition to the Enzo Ferrari biographical canon brings an insider's perspective: author Luca Dal Monte is a former PR man who worked for Ferrari. Mainstream reviewers have been slightly sniffy about its laser focus on cars and races, without much in the way of historic or socio-political context. But it's generally effective at shining a light on a man who enjoyed being wreathed in myths.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Ultimate
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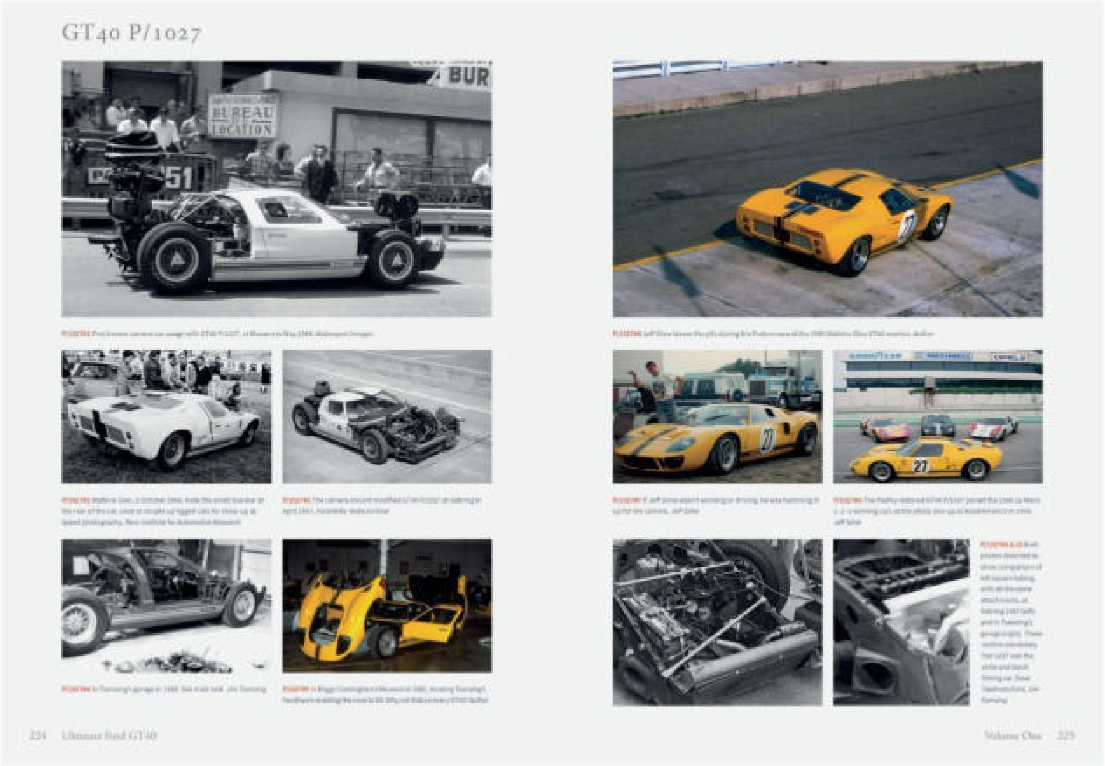
GT40
The Definitive History
THE CHASSIS HISTORIES
Ronnie Spain
Ultimate Ford GT40 The Definitive History



GT40 P/1027

ULTIMATE FORD GT40 – THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY VOLUME 1

porterpress.co.uk
RRP £325

Famously, *Game of Thrones* aficionados have been waiting many years for author George RR Martin to 'get on with it' and complete the final novel in the sequence. But this hiatus in productivity is nothing compared with the gestation period of this opus. A truck driver by trade, renowned Ford GT40 expert Ronnie Spain has taken his time to go the distance with this first volume of the model's history. His original GT40 book was published in the mid-1980s…

The level of detail is extraordinary. This first volume details the history of every individual chassis, from the prototypes through to the MkIVs, including the J-cars and the two aluminium-bodied Alan Mann models, plus the seven original spares. As well as technical details there are exhaustive competition histories and ownership timelines.

As usual with the Porter Press this is an epic production: a 576-page large-format hardback with glossy paper stock that really makes the images ping. And there are a lot of them – 1300 in all, many previously unpublished. There are three more volumes to go, which will feature the work of former Autosport club editor Mark Cole and GT40 gurus John Allen and Graham Endeacott – good to know we can expect the last one before the year 2095!

1968
WORLD CONSTRUCTORS CHAMPIONS
1992
WORLD CONSTRUCTORS CHAMPIONS
1988
WORLD CONSTRUCTORS CHAMPIONS

BIRTH-MARQUE – CHAMPIONS OF F1 T-SHIRTS

retrogp.com
RRP £25

While it's impolite to ask a lady her age, anyone wishing to advertise their year of birth in a suitably rorty fashion can now do so with Retro GP's new collection. In fact this would render a recent Autosport office game – 'Who was the world champion when you were born?' – moot.

Retro GP has collaborated with Italian motorsport artist Sauro Torreggiani to produce a set of T-shirts representing the constructors' championship winner from each year, though it's still a work in progress. Detail-minded readers will be reassured to know that for the years pre-dating the inauguration of the constructors' title, the drivers' champion is represented. At the time of writing, production has reached the 2000s so younger readers need not fret unduly.

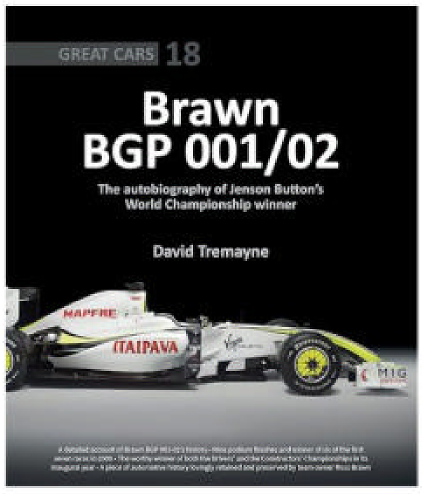
WILLIAMS RACING
BUILT FOR ATHLETES

BUILT FOR ATHLETES WILLIAMS COLLECTION

builtforathletes.com
RRP £49.99-£425

The resurgence of the Williams team isn't just a factor of on-track performance – you know you've arrived when you can sign up an official luggage supplier. Premium fitness brand Built For Athletes has previously worked with Alfa Romeo-Sauber and Red Bull Racing, and now it has 'dropped' (to use millennial marketing argot) a bespoke limited-edition Williams collection of five pieces.

Ranging from a small, lightweight cross-body bag through two backpacks to wheeled bags of 60 and 90-litre capacity, the luggage is ergonomically designed and presented in a deep blue colour matching the team's current identity. The 20-litre roll-top backpack features a laptop compartment as well as two drinks holders, while the 60-litre case modelled here by Carlos Sainz has skate wheels, a telescopic handle, and interior webbing to secure your belongings. All rather more tasteful than that Louis Vuitton clobber F1's bigwigs are carting their chattels around in…

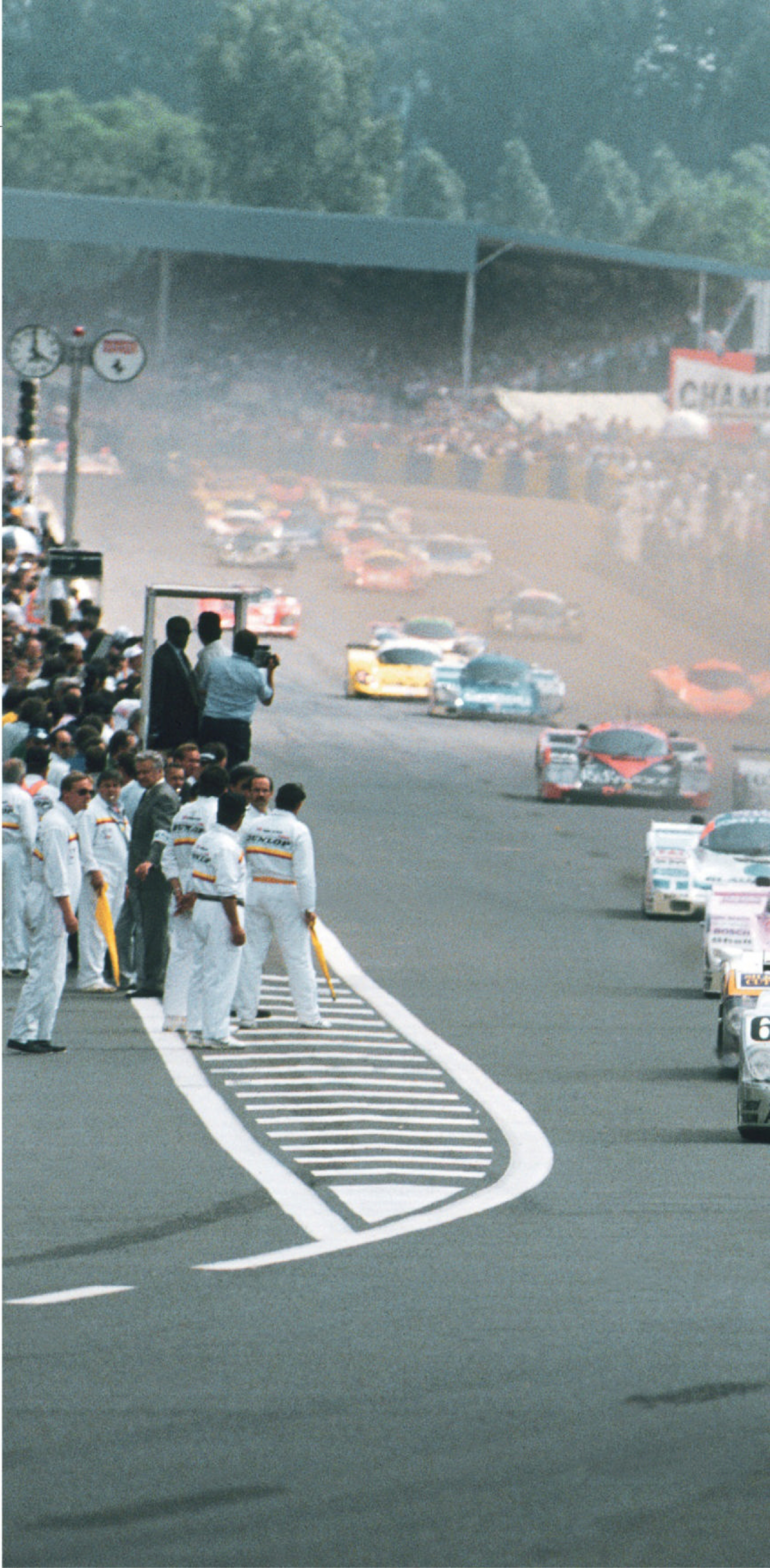

GREAT CARS 18
Brawn
BGP 001/02
The autobiography of Jenson Button's World Championship winner
David Tremayne

BRAWN BGP 001/02 – THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JENSON BUTTON'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WINNER

porterpress.co.uk
RRP £69

Sixteen years ago, Ross Brawn's last-gasp management buyout of the moribund Honda team unleashed the car upon which the company had spent many millions of dollars researching through the previous season.

The renamed BGP 001 was blisteringly quick at first, but Brawn's lack of development budget began to tell as the season wore on and others caught up. David Tremayne's painstakingly researched tome draws on first-hand accounts to analyse the car and the season, and the double-diffuser feature that stoked so much controversy. Among the insiders involved is the eventual world champion, Jenson Button.



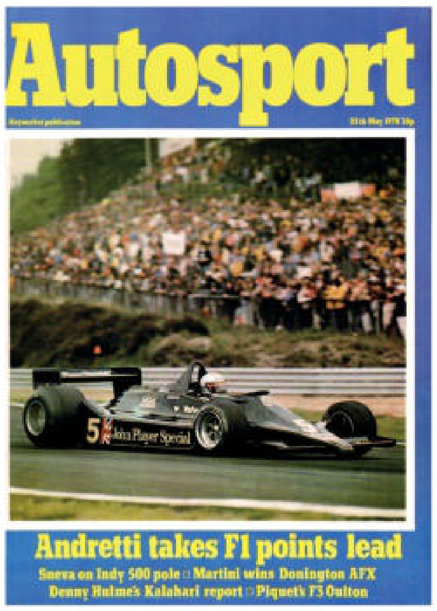
Let fly the Silver Arrows

The Sauber-Mercedes C9 of Mauro Baldi, Kenny Acheson and Gianfranco Brancatelli leads the sister car shared by Jean-Louis Schlesser, Jean-Pierre Jabouille and Alain Cudini at the start of the 1989 Le Mans 24 Hours. Squint through the haze and the #63 Jochen Mass/Manuel Reuter/Stanley Dickens Sauber, which was only 11th fastest in practice due to a broken fifth gear, is just visible in the pack. Come 0730 on Sunday, Baldi was out front when fading brakes forced a spin, handing an advantage to the chasing Dickens that his car maintained to the flag, with Mass installed for the final stint. Acheson gamely made it home as runner-up despite being stuck in fifth gear, while #62 finished in fifth place.

Photography Getty Images

Where Circuit de la Sarthe, France
When Saturday 10 June 1989

JAGUAR
Lucas
SAUBER MERCEDES
62
AEG
61
AEG
BRUN
JAGUAR
Castrol



Autosport

Andretti takes F1 points lead

Sneva on Indy 500 pole □ Martini wins Donington AFX

Denny Hulme's Kalahari report □ Piquet's F3 Oulton

Andretti leads Villeneuve, Scheckter and Peterson

PHIPPS/GETTY IMAGES

Lotus rubs it in with more F1 innovation

25 May 1978

Colin Chapman and Lotus probably did more to advance the grand prix car than any other team during the 1960s and 1970s. The Lotus 78 of 1977 ushered in the first era of ground effect in Formula 1 and would have won titles with better engine reliability, but the design that hammered home the use of a car's underbody to produce downforce was the Lotus 79.

The neat – most would say beautiful – machine made its grand prix debut at the sixth round of the 1978 championship. Only one was on hand at Zolder for Mario Andretti, who promptly qualified on pole by 0.79 seconds. Team-mate Ronnie Peterson was 1.72s slower in the 'old' Lotus 78, enough for seventh. "I would have to say that Colin has done it again," said Andretti. "The 78 is yesterday's car..."

Following some startline mayhem, the Ferrari of impressive newcomer Gilles Villeneuve ran second to Andretti before suffering a tyre blowout. The Canadian would eventually finish fourth, while Peterson moved in the opposite direction. The 'yesterday' Lotus was fourth at the end of lap one and soon overcame Jody Scheckter's Wolf. He therefore inherited second when Villeneuve's rubber failed him on lap 40 of 70. Peterson's day was made more dramatic when he was forced to pit for a new front tyre in the closing stages. He fell to fourth, but charged back to second, overtaking Carlos Reutemann's Ferrari with fewer than four laps to go. "Peterson at his best," reckoned Autosport's Nigel Roebuck. The Swede set a new lap record during his recovery but crossed the line nearly 10s behind an unflustered Andretti. New Lotus had beaten old Lotus, which had defeated everything else!

Andretti won in Lotus 79, Peterson second in 78

GETTY IMAGES

Interestingly, over the Belgian Grand Prix weekend Goodyear issued a statement, essentially bemoaning the fact that new rival Michelin – which had introduced the radial tyre to F1 – was only supplying Ferrari and Renault, and was thereby able to offer a greater service than was possible for Goodyear, which supplied the rest of the grid.

The 'solution' outlined a disparity between rubber supplied to different drivers from the same manufacturer: "Goodyear will cover eight drivers with as many tyre combinations as we can provide. These eight drivers are Mario Andretti, Patrick Depailler, Emerson Fittipaldi, James Hunt, Niki Lauda, Ronnie Peterson, Jody Scheckter and John Watson. But to provide an opportunity to drivers other than the above eight, Goodyear will supply a choice of all available tyres to two drivers based on the result of qualifying times in the first two practice sessions. These tyres will be made available at the start of the second day's practice session. However, if, after the first practice session, a driver other than the mentioned eight is considerably faster than the remainder of the field, Goodyear will provide this driver with a choice of all available tyres immediately after that session."

Autosport reckoned Goodyear's solution was the best available, given the American manufacturer's far greater F1 commitment, but it was Lotus that had really changed the game that weekend.

Following its debut, the 79 was only once beaten to pole and won five of the remaining 10 rounds. That tally would have been more had it not been for some unreliability and Andretti losing Italian GP victory to a jump-start penalty. It was easily enough to secure both crowns for Lotus and Andretti, but the success was marred by the death of the popular Peterson following a start accident at Monza.

The game swiftly moved on in 1979 as others adopted the ground-effect philosophy more effectively and Lotus would never win another F1 title, but it had once again led the way on technical innovation and shaping the future.

KEVIN TURNER

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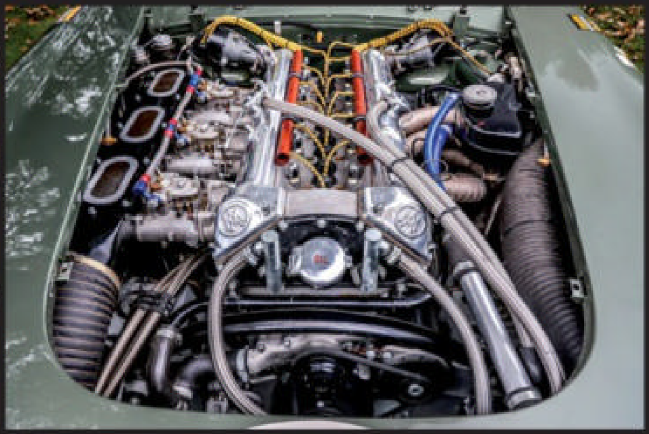

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